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23 December 2016

Mrs Lisa Lockett
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Lockett

Short inspection of Stalyhill Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 6 December 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in March 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school has continued to improve at a pace because of your focus on ensuring consistently good-quality teaching and learning. Your strong, transparent leadership and passion for providing pupils with a memorable educational experience are highly effective. You, and all staff, have created a strong sense of care and nurture for the whole school community. All staff who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire are proud to be part of Stalyhill Infants and all agree that the school is well led, and that they are treated fairly and with respect.

You and your deputy have led staff in a shared commitment and enthusiasm to improve the school. The high expectations you have set ensure that there is a strong focus on achieving the very best for your pupils. Pupils, parents and staff have a strong sense of being part of a school that loves and is excited by learning. Parents who spoke to me, or responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, are very positive about the school and are unanimous in recommending it to others. A number of parents particularly appreciate that you and your staff are very welcoming and approachable. A large number of parents commented on how you are regularly in the playground to greet them and pupils in the morning and afternoon. Comments from parents such as: 'Our child bounces out of bed to go to school every day,' 'fantastic school,' and 'the communication is excellent between parents and teachers,' are typical. It is clear, from only my short time with you, that this is a happy, purposeful school.

In 2016, a high proportion of children reached a good level of development at the end of Reception. The percentage of pupils that met the expected standard in the national phonics screening check, at the end of Year 1, was above that for pupils of a similar age nationally. Pupils' attainment and progress at the end of key stage 1 were above the expected standard in reading, writing, mathematics and spelling, punctuation and grammar.

At the end of key stage 1, the proportion of pupils working at greater depth was higher than pupils of a similar age nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. However, you are mindful that even more pupils have the potential to achieve at greater depth, particularly those that are of middle ability and the most able disadvantaged pupils. The plans you have put in place are already leading to further improvement in this area and these pupils are now on track to achieve at a more challenging level.

Those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are very well supported by staff and they make good and better progress through school. Disadvantaged pupils are similarly well supported and the vast majority make the progress of which they are capable.

Since the previous inspection, the curriculum has developed considerably. You have responded well to the recent national changes and are now adding your own innovations to create a curriculum that is distinctive and fast becoming a strength of the school, although I recognise that these initiatives still need further embedding. Your emphasis on the importance of developing pupils as 'super learners' is extremely effective, for example, by developing the characteristics of a good learner through 'Thinking Theo', 'Keep Going Kate', 'Teamwork Tina' and 'Reflective Ravi'. As a result, pupils have an excellent attitude to learning.

At the previous inspection, inspectors identified a need to ensure that teachers effectively check on pupils' understanding in lessons and that the pace of teaching increased. They also identified a need to improve the way staff enunciate in phonics lessons and that middle leaders are provided with further training. Finally inspectors asked that leaders increase the resources available in school to celebrate diversity and equality.

Leaders have addressed all of these aspects effectively and have ensured that the following improvements have taken place:

- Teachers respond to pupils very regularly in lessons. They do this by asking questions and clarifying pupils' understanding as they are working. Adults mark pupils' work spontaneously during the lesson, in agreement with the school's marking policy. As a result, pupils get an immediate verbal response to what they are doing and adjust their learning accordingly.

- There is a good pace established in lessons. Pupils are given plenty of opportunities to learn new skills and suitable time to practise them. Lessons are interesting and pupils are eager to join in. As a result, the large quantity of work in pupils' books, relatively early in the school year, indicates that no time is wasted.
- Training has been provided for all adults in a new approach to teaching phonics. High-quality teaching by all adults is embedded throughout the school. As a result, a high proportion of pupils meets the expected standards.
- The development of middle leaders has been reviewed and revised in the light of the new curriculum and changes in staffing. This is a current priority in the school development plan.
- Resources that reflect the diversity of modern Britain and the world are prominent throughout school. There are ample opportunities for pupils to learn about other religions, cultures and the differences between people in pupils' day-to-day learning and topic work.

Safeguarding is effective.

There are extremely well-maintained systems in place in all areas of safeguarding, and staff understand them. Safeguarding arrangements are regularly reviewed to meet statutory requirements. Frequent and appropriate training for staff and governors is undertaken and up to date, including that related to the 'Prevent' duty. You and your team ensure that pupils are kept safe and their welfare needs are met. Vigilance around the care and support of vulnerable pupils is of a high standard.

Pupils were unanimous in saying that they feel very safe and well cared for in school. They are confident that adults will help them if needed. Pupils develop effective personal skills within a nurturing environment. Pupils talk with knowledge about the ways that they can stay safe in a range of situations, including personally and online. Parents feel that you and the staff keep their children safe and well looked after. As a result, pupils are very happy and keen to come to school.

Inspection findings

- Your school's self-evaluation and school development plans are of a high standard. They are accurate, reflective and used effectively to ensure that everyone in school is clear about the direction in which they are heading. You and your leadership team have an extremely good capacity for further improvement.
- Your drive for improvement has been focused effectively on establishing high expectations, and uncompromising consistency in the quality of teaching and learning. You know each teacher's strengths and areas for development very well. Staff have benefited from a range of high-quality training and development.

- You have forged excellent links with the local feeder junior school to the benefit of staff and pupils. You have taken up opportunities for staff to check on assessment between the two schools and share practice and skills between them. Also, along with your counterpart in the junior school, you have set up a good quality of transition for pupils leaving Year 2 and joining Year 3, to make the changeover as easy for them as possible. You and your staff are actively and beneficially involved in local school networks.
- Governors are very effective and play an informed role in evaluating the school's effectiveness. Governors have used their own experiences well to play an active role in the life of the school. They share your passion for providing the best for pupils. They are very supportive but are also able to challenge where needed.
- The information you gather about pupils' progress is appropriate. You have developed a clear, simple and successful system that is used effectively by leaders, teachers and governors. This information straightforwardly identifies which pupils or groups are making progress and which need some additional support or challenge. It has also been effective in encouraging teachers in lessons to focus on the skills and attributes that pupils have and need to gain.
- Your regular checks and meetings ensure that all staff feel responsible for every pupil's learning and gives them an opportunity to reflect on how they could further adapt their teaching to meet their pupils' needs. Parents particularly mentioned to me how well you meet their child's needs, and if required, are quick to support them to catch up or remove any barriers to learning they might have.
- You have correctly identified the need to improve further the achievement of pupils to reach greater depth in their learning, particularly those that are of middle ability and the most able disadvantaged pupils. To this end, you have taken decisive action, including refining your English and mathematics curriculum and identifying pupils that are 'lead learners'. This is already having an impact and evidence suggests that pupils are on track to make good and better progress.
- Attendance is above the national average. You have good-quality systems for monitoring attendance and punctuality and you use them effectively. There is virtually no persistent absence because of your high expectations and the importance you place on pupils being in school. Where families are struggling, you are firm but supportive and exercise appropriate sensitivity on an individual family basis. As a result, you have had great success in improving the attendance of those that have needed encouragement.
- Pupils' personal development, behaviour and spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness are strong in school. Conduct around the school building and in class is of a very high standard. Pupils are polite, kind and thoughtful to each other. Pupils say that 'if someone falls over, we go to them, help them up, we never walk away'. One pupil commented that everyone is welcome: 'we treat everyone the same, and we make them feel happy and comfortable'. This is typical of the consideration that pupils have for each other.

- A real strength of the school is how well you communicate with parents. All of the parents I spoke to during the inspection commented on how much they appreciated you making sure that they know how their child is doing and how they can help them further. The regular parent forums that you hold, where parents can ask questions, share views and hear about developments and approaches in school, are very much appreciated. Parents also say that issues or concerns, no matter how small, are followed up promptly.
- Teachers use their subject knowledge well to provide engaging and motivating activities in class. As a result, pupils have a very good attitude to learning. There is a consistent focus throughout the school on a high standard of presentation and on ensuring that the marking policy is followed.
- You have put a number of new and innovative strategies in place to strengthen teaching and learning further and to support pupils to develop as independent and resilient learners. These approaches are already having a positive impact on further improving the quality of teaching and building confident learners. However, I agree with you that these approaches are still at an early stage of implementation and need to be embedded so that they are second nature to staff and pupils.
- Pupils enjoy problem solving in mathematics and they apply their mathematical skills well. Pupils are encouraged to explain and talk about the skills they use. This they do with enthusiasm and confidence. The importance of reading and writing is prominent throughout the school. Many pupils read well and those that struggle have a good range of strategies to help them. The most able readers enjoy reading and are offered a good range of interesting books to enthuse them. Work in pupils' mathematics and writing books indicates good progress over time.
- Opportunities to write across the curriculum are clearly evident, as are occasions to write for different purposes to a high standard. For example, in Year 2, pupils were motivated by finding descriptive words about what their homes would be like at Christmas. They used their senses to think about how it would smell, the sounds that might be heard and the sights they would see. This was in preparation for reading 'Coming Home' by Michael Morpurgo.
- Most children start early years with skills and knowledge that are typical for their age. There is a good quality of provision and teaching offered to Reception children. As a result, children make good progress by the time they leave. There is a wide range of stimulating, good-quality learning experiences available to children and they visibly enjoy engaging in them. As a result, children are happy and keen to learn.
- Writing, phonics and number are a strong focus in the early years and, as a result, children's skills in these areas equip children well to start in Year 1. The effective use of assessment information ensures that provision and learning are matched closely to children's needs. Adults have very positive relationships with children and also parents, who describe staff as 'amazing'.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to keep a close eye on ensuring that pupils, particularly those that are of middle ability and the most able disadvantaged, are challenged and extended in lessons so that they make the gains in learning of which they are capable
- embed the strategies introduced to ensure that pupils get the most out of their learning and develop strong skills to be independent, resilient learners.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Tameside. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Eastwood
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team, including the person responsible for maintaining safeguarding records. I also met with pupils, six governors, including the chair of the governing body, and a representative of Tameside local authority. We visited lessons and I scrutinised pupils' work. I took account of the 55 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the views of 12 parents spoken to before the school day. I took account of 15 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and spoke to staff during the day. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school. I looked at a number of documents, including: information about pupils' achievement; your school self-evaluation; the school improvement plan; behaviour and incident logs; and documents relating to safeguarding.

As part of this inspection, five lines of enquiry were followed:

- How have key issues from the previous inspection been addressed, sustained and moved on?
- How are leaders ensuring that they are achieving greater depth for the most able disadvantaged pupils?
- What strategies are in place to convert more of the middle-ability pupils in key stage 1 to greater depth in mathematics?
- What were the reasons for the phonics dip in 2015 and are the improvements in 2016 sustainable?
- What are pupils' starting points, in order to indicate the progress made through school?