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Dr Richard Kentish
Executive Headteacher
Abbey Infant School
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Dear Dr Kentish

Short inspection of Abbey Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 17 October 2017, 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

Along with other school leaders, you have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. In September 2014, you joined the school as executive headteacher. The school is in a federation with Abbey Junior School. Over the last three years, you have secured the confidence of governors, staff and parents. They agreed that you and your senior leadership team are determined to provide the very best learning opportunities for all your pupils. Parents are very supportive of the school and appreciate the nurturing environment provided by the staff. The great majority of parents would recommend the school to others. As one parent wrote, 'My child loves going to school, has made great progress and feels appreciated.'

Pupils spoke positively about school. They enjoy lessons, trips and extra-curricular activities, all of which help to bring the curriculum to life. For example, Year 2 pupils talked enthusiastically about a recent visit to Weston-Super-Mare which was linked to their class topic. Pupils also talked about the importance of treating people from different backgrounds equally, referring to examples that they had learned about as part of Black History Month. They also showed an age-appropriate knowledge of world regions, and talked about trips to a mosque and a gurdwara. These experiences effectively support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education and help to prepare them well for life in modern Britain.

You have high expectations of staff and these, in turn, are passed on to the pupils. Since joining the school you have worked with teachers and learning support practitioners to further improve outcomes for all pupils. For example, pupils are encouraged to apply their skills in different contexts and to work independently. You ensure consistency across the school through effective performance management processes and regular training opportunities for all staff. You have also revised the school's curriculum and introduced new approaches to the teaching of writing and mathematics. However, there is even more that you could do to ensure that the curriculum is focused and relevant for the needs of your pupils. This is a next step in the school's development.

You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Teachers now provide all pupils with an appropriate level of challenge and, by the end of key stage 1, the proportion of pupils achieving at the higher standard is above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. The governing body is now very effective in its role, providing you and your leadership team with a good balance of support and challenge. Whole-school attendance has improved and it has been above the national average for over three years. However, attendance is not equally strong for all groups of pupils and you agree that this is an area that requires further improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

Keeping children safe is at the heart of your work. You have created a safeguarding team which ensures that the school is a safe environment for pupils and that they are well cared for at all times. Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

All staff have annual training to understand their responsibilities in keeping pupils safe. Staff are clear about what they should do if they have any safeguarding concerns. You and your team focus on dealing with any difficulties or concerns as early as possible to try to stop them from escalating. This preventative work is effective. Where appropriate your team works closely with external agencies and you are persistent in following up concerns about pupils' welfare. You have a good understanding of the specific safeguarding concerns that relate to the context of the school. Governors understand their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding and regularly review systems and processes. You provide many opportunities to help pupils learn how to stay safe and pupils say that they feel safe in school.

Inspection findings

- The curriculum you and your team have created is central to the work of the school and it provides pupils with a range of rich and varied experiences. Topics often start with a visit to inspire the pupils and end with an event that celebrates what they have learned. For example, Year 1 pupils recently visited the Black Country Museum as an introduction to 'The Victorians'. Pupils apply their literacy and mathematics skills within other subject areas and you now track pupils' progress across all subjects.

- You, along with staff, parents and pupils have developed 'The Abbey Bucket List' for each year group which consists of a range of activities that each pupil will have the opportunity to experience. You also incorporate a range of 'soft skills' into the curriculum such as decision-making, problem-solving and communicating clearly. These skills are effective in developing pupils' self-confidence and independence. You have an aim to create a curriculum which 'inspires, engages and motivates' all pupils, preparing them well for life outside of school. To achieve this, you want to develop the curriculum further to include a range of 'life skills'.
- In writing, you have introduced a focus on encouraging pupils to talk about their ideas before writing them down and this, along with greater focus on the teaching of spelling, grammar and punctuation skills, is having a positive impact on the quality of the pupils' writing. In the Reception Year, you have introduced an innovative approach to supporting the development of children's handwriting. The programme helps the children to coordinate the movement of their arms, legs and body, which in turn helps them to better coordinate small muscle movements in the hands and fingers with the eyes. This approach has led to children making faster than usual progress in writing.
- You and your leadership team have also introduced a new, school-specific, approach to the teaching of mathematics. You now have a very clear calculation policy in place which shows how pupils' basic mathematics skills are developed across the school. Pupils use a wide range of practical equipment to support their learning. Your staff regularly encourage pupils to challenge themselves and the pupils have opportunities to apply their skills in a variety of contexts. Many pupils can talk confidently about their learning and what they need to do next to improve. Teachers and learning support practitioners support this well through effective questioning to stimulate pupils' thinking. Staff provide workshops for parents to help them learn more about their child's education.
- You and your leadership team have established an effective assessment system which allows you to track the progress pupils are making in reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, everyone is clear about which individuals and groups of pupils are making good progress and who is at risk of falling behind. Where necessary, specific actions are identified to support pupils' learning, including the most able pupils. These actions are reviewed and revised regularly to ensure that they are making a positive difference.
- The changes you have made to the curriculum and your assessment system have had a beneficial impact on the progress all pupils are making across the school and on their outcomes at the end of key stage 1. In 2017, provisional information shows that the proportion of pupils reaching the standard expected for their age is above the national average in reading and science. In writing and mathematics, while the proportion remains below the national average, the gap has narrowed, especially in mathematics. These outcomes reflect good progress from the pupils' starting points. Outcomes at the end of Reception Year and in the Year 1 phonics screening check also indicate outcomes in line with those seen nationally.

- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress. By the end of key stage 1, the proportion achieving the standards expected for their age is similar to other pupils nationally.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported throughout the school. Close attention is paid to the identification of an individual's needs and support is precisely targeted. The impact of any additional input is carefully tracked to ensure that it is effective in helping the pupils to make good progress from their starting points.
- The great majority of pupils enjoy coming to school and overall attendance was higher than the national average in 2016. However, attendance for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those eligible for free school meals was in the lowest 10% nationally. Information for 2017 shows that attendance for pupils who have free school meals remains below that for all pupils. You recognise and reward good attendance and you contact parents when a pupil's attendance drops below an acceptable level. However, you are aware of the need to do more to maximise pupils' attendance. The procedures you and your staff follow, including contacting parents on the first day of absence, help to ensure that pupils are safe and not at risk of going missing from education.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- developments with the school's curriculum continue to raise standards for all pupils while further preparing them for life outside of school
- further actions are taken to maintain the current overall levels of attendance and ensure high attendance by vulnerable groups.

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

Yours sincerely

Catherine Crooks
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you, the deputy headteacher and members of staff. I met with three governors, including the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority. I talked with parents at the start and end of the day and with pupils both formally and informally.

We visited almost all classes together, where we observed teaching and learning, spoke to some pupils and looked at examples of their work. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school. I scrutinised the school's own evaluation of its performance and documents relating to keeping pupils safe, performance management and pupils' attendance.

I took account of 66 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, 45 comments received electronically and one hand-delivered letter. I also took account of 33 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.