

19 July 2018

Mrs Laura Cichuta
Abington Vale Primary School
Ashford Close
Abington Vale
Northampton
Northamptonshire
NN3 3NQ

Dear Mrs Cichuta

Short inspection of Abington Vale Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 July 2018, 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

The number of pupils in the school has almost doubled since the last inspection. You and other leaders have successfully managed the challenges this expansion has posed. Pupils' progress and attainment have remained in line with the national averages. Pupils are well prepared for secondary education.

Leaders have worked closely with colleagues in the Northamptonshire Partnership Academy Trust (NPAT) to ensure that Abington Vale is a continually improving school. To build upon the school's strengths leaders have:

- increased the contribution that phase leaders and subject leaders make to driving school improvement
- revised the approach to teaching reading, writing and mathematics in order to deepen pupils' understanding of these subjects
- improved provision for pupils with additional needs and for pupils who speak English as an additional language
- provided wider opportunities for pupils in areas such as sport, the arts and technology.

Pupils enjoy school because you and your staff ensure that Abington Vale is inclusive and welcoming. They participate in large numbers in the many sports and

other physical activities that the school offers. They are proud of the school's successes in sporting competitions, including football, cycling, athletics and swimming. The quality of the pupils' artwork displayed around the school is impressive. Similarly, their workbooks recording the school's links with the Royal Shakespeare Company highlight that pupils enjoy a rich and imaginative curriculum.

The previous inspection report asked leaders to improve pupils' progress in reading. Leaders have introduced successful strategies that have increased both the number and the range of books pupils read. In addition, they have revised how pupils are taught to read with insight and understanding. Pupils' progress and attainment in reading are in line with the national averages. However, you agree that the ambition for what pupils can achieve should be raised still higher. The school roll is now stable and a new leadership structure is in place, which addresses the challenges raised by having two school campuses. A next step for leaders is to raise pupils' progress and attainment in reading, and also in writing and mathematics, to be above the national averages.

There are two other areas for leaders to improve. The rates of pupil absence and persistent absence are above the national averages, and not all pupils arrive at school punctually. Improving attendance and punctuality are important next steps.

The large majority of parents are very pleased with Abington Vale. They would recommend it to other parents. However, a small minority of parents did share their concerns about how leaders respond to issues they raise. Reviewing how effectively leaders communicate with parents who raise concerns and making any necessary changes are final next steps for the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team and governors ensure that all safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose. Staff receive the necessary training on how to keep children safe in education. They use the online safeguarding tool effectively to record any concerns they have about a pupil's welfare.

Pupils are confident that the school's staff will do all that they can to keep them safe. They value the help available if they are feeling sad or anxious. This includes the support of two well-being mentors and areas around the school where pupils can take some 'time out'. Visitors to the school, such as representatives from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, guide pupils on how to keep themselves safe in a range of potentially harmful situations.

The inclusion team works effectively with families and local organisations. It has a good knowledge of the issues, both local and national, that can put pupils at risk of harm. It challenges any external agencies which it judges do not respond appropriately to its referrals. During the current school year, improving rates of attendance has been a safeguarding priority. There has been some success, but the rates of absence and persistent absence remain above the national averages.

Inspection findings

- In 2016 and 2017, disadvantaged pupils made slower progress than other pupils. Improvements in the overall quality of teaching have particularly benefited disadvantaged pupils. High-quality professional development, including support from other schools in NPAT, has raised the expectations teachers have of pupils. It has also improved teachers' subject knowledge so that they can explain the concepts they are teaching more clearly. Staff, including teaching assistants, are also more skilled in checking on pupils' understanding during lessons. This enables them to respond quickly if pupils are confused, or if they are finding the work too easy.
- Leaders target pupil premium funding more sharply on improving academic progress than in the past. Disadvantaged pupils of all abilities now benefit from additional help if there are signs of underachievement. Teachers and senior leaders check closely on the impact of any additional support provided. As a result, disadvantaged pupils are making better progress and their attainment is closer to that of other pupils.
- Information about pupils' progress in the past showed that middle-ability pupils made better progress than other pupils. Teaching now meets the needs of all ability groups more successfully. Assessment of pupils currently in the school shows that all ability groups now make similar progress.
- The teaching of phonics skills is very effective. Above-average proportions of Year 1 pupils consistently reach the expected standard in their phonics screening check. Staff in Reception and Year 1 make regular assessments of their pupils' phonics skills. They use the information gained to plan lessons that match the needs of the pupils in their teaching groups. Where necessary, they provide additional teaching for anyone who is struggling to keep up with their peers. All of these strategies contribute to the strong record of attainment in phonics.
- Pupils have made better progress in mathematics this year. Teaching in mathematics now places a greater emphasis on developing strong mental arithmetic skills. Daily sessions ensure that most pupils can recall number facts confidently. Training has improved teachers' ability to explain mathematical concepts to pupils more clearly. It has also improved the effectiveness of their questioning in mathematics lessons. As a result, pupils develop good reasoning skills and gain a deeper understanding of the concepts being covered. The next step is to build upon these improvements so that still greater proportions of pupils attain and exceed the standards expected for their ages.
- Since the last inspection, the proportion of pupils at the school who speak English as an additional language has increased. It is not uncommon for pupils to come to the school with little or no English. Leaders have put in place a programme to help these pupils settle into school and learn English. The programme includes mentoring by other pupils who also speak their first language and individual support from skilled specialist staff. Staff work closely with families so that they too can support their children's language acquisition.

- Teachers ensure that extending pupils' vocabularies is a priority throughout the school day. Pupils practise their skills at speaking, reading and writing in English across the curriculum. These strategies ensure that pupils who speak English as an additional language make good progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- high-quality teaching enables greater proportions of pupils to attain and exceed the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics
- actions taken to lower the rates of absence and persistent absence bring these to below the national averages
- all pupils arrive at school on time
- they review how effectively leaders respond to parental concerns and make any necessary improvements to communication between leaders and parents.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the Northampton Primary Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Anthony O'Malley
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you and members of your senior leadership team to discuss the school's effectiveness. I also met with three members of the governing body and the chief executive from the Northampton Primary Academy Trust.

A group of older pupils shared their views with me about the school. I talked with other pupils as I met them in lessons. I looked at work in pupils' books. I considered documents, including those linked to keeping pupils safe, the school's self-evaluation document and the school's improvement plan. I spoke with a number of parents as they brought their children to school. I took account of the views of parents through the 99 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View. There were 33 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 120 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey which were also taken into account.