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7 November 2018

Mr Andy Dyall
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Dear Mr Dyall

Short inspection of Castlecroft Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 October 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since your appointment in September 2013, you have established a culture of high expectations for pupils and staff. The school has continued to improve, in spite of having to restructure the workforce and reduce staffing due to budgetary constraints. With the support of the very able governing body, you and your team have managed these changes while sustaining a strong focus on teaching quality and pupils' achievement.

Having had a resource base for visually impaired children since 1978, the school has a long tradition of caring for children who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. You have built upon this experience and developed further the inclusive ethos of the school. As a result, the school provides a caring environment to all, and support for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is a strength of the school. Parents and carers widely acknowledge and appreciate the cohesive nature of the school community. Typically, parents' comments refer to 'the atmosphere of the school being one of feeling safe, enjoyment of learning and being included'. Other comments include 'Staff encourage, educate and support pupils academically, physically, emotionally and socially.'

Pupils also value the caring ethos of the school. They enjoy school because of the pleasant environment and the opportunities it provides. They trust and respect their

teachers. Pupils are keen to contribute to the school community by taking up roles on the school council or as house captains. They talk with enthusiasm about the clubs and sports, as well as the activities that enrich the curriculum, such as trips and visits. During the inspection, the Year 5 class was away on a visit to the Black Country Museum.

You have been thorough and methodical in addressing the areas for improvement identified during the previous inspection. You introduced changes to the timetable in 2014 to increase lesson time in the morning. You also implemented successful strategies to encourage pupils to read. You carefully checked the impact of your initiatives on the performance of boys and made necessary adjustments over time to keep on closing the attainment gap with girls. As a result, there were no significant differences between the attainment and progress of boys and girls by the end of the summer term 2018.

You have appointed a number of new staff over the last two years – mostly newly qualified – for whom you provide extensive training to ensure that the quality of teaching remains high. You are also increasing the leadership capacity by developing the role of middle leaders. You are aware, however, that you still have to continue to develop the newer members of staff to secure sustained improvements and consistency in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Similarly, middle leaders have to continue to grow in their roles to contribute further to the continuous improvement of the quality of education.

Safeguarding is effective.

You work closely with the local authority to establish a strong culture of safeguarding. Supported by a cycle of regular local authority audits and reviews of the safeguarding processes, you ensure that the school continues to have a sharp focus on what needs to be done to create a safe environment for children. Consequently, all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and the culture of safeguarding is a strength of the school. Detailed and well-organised records show that you work closely with external agencies to protect children. You follow up issues that affect children's well-being rigorously and make sure that problems are solved promptly.

Staff receive regular training and you check that all adults in the school are up to date with the latest statutory requirements. As a result, all staff – including non-teaching staff – are aware of their responsibilities and are confident about reporting their concerns about pupils they identify as being potentially at risk.

Pupils say that they feel safe at school. They are clear about what they need to do to keep safe in a range of situations in their everyday life. Parts of the curriculum cover safeguarding issues. Assemblies focused on safety and talks from representatives of the police and the fire service contribute to reinforcing pupils' awareness of how to keep safe.

Inspection findings

- Generally, children who join the early years are at a level of development that is typical for their age. Most make appropriate progress. However, there were fluctuations in the proportion of children reaching the early learning goals in recent years, with a slight decline in 2017.
- The recently appointed early years leader knows the provision well and has a clear vision of what needs to be achieved to improve. The redesigned learning journals introduced at the start of term allow staff to capture and record accurately children's progress. As a result, staff can address each child's development needs with increased precision. Staff in the early years make good use of the indoor and outdoor areas to devise activities that encourage children to develop their curiosity, either independently or in activities led by adults. Staff develop children's aptitudes to count, read and write through engaging activities. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development increased in 2018. You are currently focusing on ensuring that all children, especially disadvantaged and the most able children, are supported to make good or better progress from their starting points.
- There were also fluctuations in the outcomes in phonics by the end of Year 1, with a decline in 2017 and 2018. Developing the quality of teaching in phonics is high on your list of priorities. All staff involved in the teaching of phonics have received additional training to improve the delivery of the scheme you use. The impact of this training is in evidence in the ability of pupils to use phonics to deal successfully with reading unfamiliar texts. The development of reading comprehension skills is also a consistent feature of teaching at key stage 1. Teaching of phonics at key stage 1 is well led and new initiatives, put in place to further strengthen practice, need time to embed to deliver a sustained upward trend in phonics outcomes for all pupils.
- With the support of the leadership team and governors, you have maintained a strong focus on the improvement of teaching, learning and assessment. The school is actively involved in the local education scene. As part of the network of local schools, leaders and teachers are involved in the moderation of assessments. All members of staff have access to a wide range of professional development opportunities. You work closely with the local authority advisers and make effective use of the support they provide.
- Teaching at key stage 2 is well led and effective. While the overall progress of pupils declined slightly in English and mathematics in 2017, outcomes improved in 2018 and progress was strong across the curriculum. You make the most of the expertise of the effective practitioners in the school to develop the skills of the less-experienced members of staff across key stages. This mentoring approach – in conjunction with opportunities for newer members of staff to work with colleagues with specific teaching expertise in other schools – is successful. The development of the new members of staff – together with the nurturing of current and future leaders – provides solid foundations for the school to continue to thrive.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they keep their strong focus on the professional development of staff to ensure that the strongest practice that exists in the school becomes the norm
- they continue to develop the role of middle leaders to strengthen the leadership capacity of the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Patrick Amieli
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other leaders and the inclusion manager. I met with an adviser from the local authority and had a telephone conversation with the local authority safeguarding adviser. I also met with five governors. I had a discussion with one group of key stage 1 and key stage 2 pupils and spoke to other pupils informally. I observed teaching in the early years, key stage 1 and Year 6 with you, and looked at pupils' work. I spoke to parents at the start of the day and considered the 75 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also considered the 22 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and met with a group of teachers and teaching assistants.

I scrutinised various documents, including the school's self-evaluation and its improvement plan. We discussed the national test results and assessments undertaken by pupils in 2017 and 2018. I also looked at the school's published information on the website, as well as minutes of governing body meetings and information about attendance, behaviour and safety.