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14 June 2019

Miss J Harris & Mrs D Williams
Headteachers
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Dear Miss Harris & Mrs Williams

Short inspection of The Oval School

Following my visit to the school on 5 June 2019 with Niall Gallagher HMI, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. On your appointment, you quickly and accurately identified some key issues in the school. Working alongside advisers from the multi-academy trust (MAT), you have successfully implemented a range of school improvement strategies to address these issues. You embrace the support from the trust and this has contributed to you becoming highly effective in your roles. As a result, there have been some significant improvements in the school in a short amount of time.

Your drive and determination to ensure that every pupil receives a high-quality education is shared by all staff. Staff appreciate the training they receive to improve their practice, but also value the support you provide. All staff are proud to work at the school. Equally, pupils are proud to be members of the school. They behave well and show a high level of respect to one another and all adults. There is a real sense of community across the school.

Since the last inspection, you have redesigned the curriculum to ensure that pupils learn about a wide range of subjects. Pupils show great enthusiasm for learning. They are eager to contribute in lessons and show high levels of interest in the different subjects they learn about. Teachers ensure that pupils' knowledge and skills in different subjects are built upon from one year to the next. Throughout all subjects, teachers provide pupils with opportunities to explain and develop their learning using their literacy and numeracy skills.

There have been considerable changes in staffing over the last three years. You have managed these changes exceptionally well. You identified where high levels of training and support were needed to improve the quality of teaching rapidly. Because of your decisive and effective actions, you stemmed the decline in the school's performance and improved the quality of teaching which is now consistently good. However, the teaching of writing in key stages 1 and 2 is not yet as good as teaching in reading and mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You have pupils' safety at the heart of everything you do. Staff receive regular training to help them to be alert to any signs that pupils may be suffering from harm. You are not afraid to challenge external agencies if you feel pupils are not receiving the right support. You are relentless in your pursuit of keeping pupils as safe as possible.

You have a detailed understanding of the local issues which may pose a risk to your pupils. You engage with a range of people, such as the local police and theatre companies, to help educate pupils about the potential dangers they may face when outside school. You ensure that pupils are also educated about the potential threats of being radicalised by extremist views.

Pupils have a very strong understanding of how to use computers and the internet safely. For instance, pupils help to educate their parents about online safety. Parents appreciate the support they receive from school to help them make their devices more secure at home. Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They say there is no bullying and that 'everyone gets along'. There is a very happy and calm atmosphere across the school.

Inspection findings

- The MAT has been instrumental in helping the school make rapid improvements. The improvement partners from the MAT work very effectively with you. You appreciate the high level of challenge they provide and also their highly effective training and support. The development of the wider leadership team has been particularly successful. Leaders at all levels now contribute well to school improvement. This is helping to improve pupils' outcomes further.
- Your actions to improve teaching and learning have been very effective, especially in reading and mathematics. Pupils' progress and attainment in these subjects have improved significantly over the last two years.
- You have placed a high priority over the last two years on improving writing. You and your leaders accurately identified where improvements needed to be made, especially in the quality of planning. New initiatives such as 'a chance to shine' give pupils regular opportunities to practise and develop their writing skills.
- The teaching of writing in the early years is very strong. The learning environment provides children with high-quality, rich and meaningful

opportunities to develop their writing skills. Children eagerly engage in writing activities and show a love of learning. Children in the early years make strong progress in writing.

- However, pupils' attainment and progress in writing in other year groups have not improved as rapidly. This is especially so for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and the most able pupils. Teachers do not consistently plan well enough to meet the needs of these pupils. This results in work either being too easy for the most able pupils or too challenging for pupils with SEND. Consequently, these pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Additionally, some teachers do not insist that pupils produce work to the best of their ability. Work in some pupils' books shows variability in presentation. Some pupils repeat the same mistakes in their writing in grammar, punctuation and spelling. These mistakes are not addressed, which results in pupils repeating them. This limits the progress they make in writing.
- You identified that the number of exclusions in the school was high when compared to the national average. You have taken effective action to reduce the number of exclusions and help pupils with challenging behaviours to engage more positively in school. For example, you changed the organisation of lunchtimes and provide pupils with safe spaces to help them calm down when needed.
- You have revised the behaviour policy and ensure that everyone within the school understands the expectations of behaviour. You have also provided staff with training to help them support pupils more effectively. Parents are provided with support, where needed, to help improve their children's behaviour and engagement in school. Consequently, there has been a considerable reduction in exclusions over the last year.
- You have also improved pupils' attendance. You have gone to great lengths to help parents understand the importance of making sure their children attend school regularly. This close work with families has been further strengthened with the appointment of a dedicated attendance officer. You celebrate pupils' high attendance, which further encourages pupils to come to school regularly. Pupils say that they enjoy learning. They are eager to come to school to learn because the redesigned curriculum is exciting and interesting. Attendance has risen over this year and is now broadly in line with the national average. The rates of persistent absence have also reduced this year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that teachers:

- plan work that meets the needs of pupils with SEND
- provide a greater level of challenge for the most able pupils
- insist that pupils consistently produce work to the best of their ability
- help pupils make fewer basic mistakes in grammar, punctuation and spelling.

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

Yours sincerely

Ann Pritchard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, the deputy headteacher and leaders with responsibilities for safeguarding and English. I met with the multi-academy trust's chief executive officer and school improvement director. I also met with the trust's challenge improvement partner. Inspectors talked to pupils about their learning, visited lessons across all key stages with you and the deputy headteacher and looked at examples of pupils' work. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour before school and at lunchtime. Inspectors spoke to parents and to pupils informally throughout the day. A formal meeting was also held with a group of pupils. Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's own evaluation of its performance, the school improvement plan, documents relating to keeping pupils safe and information about pupils' attendance and behaviour. There were too few responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, for inspectors to analyse and no responses to the free-text service. Inspectors considered the 31 responses to the staff questionnaire. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire.