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Mrs Sarah Sivieri
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Dear Mrs Sivieri

Short inspection of Ashcroft Infants' School

Following my visit to the school on 12 May 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 December 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You are an enthusiastic and thoughtful leader who has high expectations of the pupils and staff. Together with the staff and governors you have created an environment where pupils become confident individuals who enjoy learning.

All the parents I spoke with and the overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire had nothing but praise for the school. Comments from parents included, 'Ashcroft is such a lovely, friendly school which has nurtured our children from an early age' and 'My child has developed academically and also socially and personally.'

Since the previous inspection, four out of the six classes in the school have been affected by numerous changes of class teacher. A number of teachers have been on maternity leave and governors have appointed temporary teachers to cover their absence. Additionally, two teachers have left and they have been replaced with new teachers. Since your appointment in 2014, you have worked well with the deputy headteacher to minimise the impact of these changes to pupils' learning. Clear return-to-work procedures give staff the chance to receive intensive training and to work with a colleague so that they familiarise themselves with new whole-school policies and procedures quickly.

At the time of the previous inspection, leaders and governors were set the task of raising the quality of teaching. The actions that you and other senior leaders have taken in response to staffing changes have been appropriate. You have helped individual teachers to improve and you have continued to make sure that pupils make good progress before they leave Year 2. You have correctly identified that a few teachers require further support with meeting more closely the learning needs of pupils, especially in mathematics. The actions you are taking in response to this are suitable.

The actions staff have taken to help pupils learn about other cultures and religions have been successful. The curriculum, assemblies and visits to places of worship effectively help to broaden pupils' understanding of national and international diversity. 'You should treat all people with different religions and beliefs with respect. You should show them love, just as you would your family,' wrote a pupil after a week of events that gave pupils the chance to learn about faiths and key celebrations from around the world.

Safeguarding is effective.

The arrangements for keeping pupils safe are effective. Senior leaders, staff and governors place the utmost importance on making sure that pupils are kept safe in school. You and the chair of the governing body review the school's safeguarding procedures regularly in order to ensure that they are fit for purpose. Staff make timely referrals to outside agencies and ensure that individual children and their families receive the support they need. The deputy headteacher meets with all new volunteers and students and makes sure that they are fully conversant with the school's policies and that they know how to deal with any concerns about children that may be brought to their attention.

The parents I spoke with told me that staff keep their children safe in school. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations. They explained, for instance, the importance of not leaving the house without telling an adult and checking fire alarms in houses regularly. Pupils are made aware of how to take care of themselves around the school and when playing. In the school playground pupils take it in turns to use the climbing equipment. They walk, climb and jump across the different items with care and dexterity so as not to hurt themselves or others.

Inspection findings

- You are highly committed to securing the best outcomes for pupils. The deputy headteacher and the teacher with responsibility for the early years provide you with effective support. Together, you hold teachers and teaching assistants effectively to account. The guidance that senior leaders provide teachers and teaching assistants is helpful. They identify the precise actions staff need to take to help different groups of pupils make faster progress. Senior leaders also check that the agreed actions have been implemented.
- Last year, the overall proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception was above the national figure. In Year 1, a

higher than average proportion of pupils met the expected standard in the phonics (letters and their sounds) check. At the end of Year 2, attainment overall was significantly above average. Nevertheless, your analysis of all these results revealed that boys in all these year groups did not achieve as well as girls. It also revealed that a lower proportion of disadvantaged pupils attained the higher Level 3 at the end of Year 2. In response to these differences you arranged for staff to receive training from local authority advisers and consultants and from senior leaders. Staff also had the opportunity to visit local schools and look at effective practice. This training is having a positive impact.

- Teachers now make sure that they plan activities that interest boys and girls. Children in the early years, for instance, were completely engrossed in their activities. In the nursery, a group of 'doctors' checked 'poorly teddy', recorded his symptoms and agreed upon a treatment. In the Reception year, boys and girls were keen to show me their challenge books. They told me that the challenges are fun. One boy commented, 'The challenges make me do harder work!' These books contain a variety of activities which successfully motivate and encourage children of all abilities to build on what they already know and can do.
- In relation to disadvantaged pupils, senior leaders are keeping a closer check on the achievement of these pupils. They make sure that pupils receive extra support with reading, writing and mathematics and, when needs be, with their emotional well-being, too. This combination ensures that pupils are ready to learn and that they catch up with their classmates.
- Your latest information shows that the actions being undertaken by senior leaders and staff are making a difference. The gaps between boys and girls are closing and the gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers are closing quickly. However, you are not complacent about these improvements. You acknowledge that further work is now required to help boys and disadvantaged pupils reach even higher standards.
- Pupils' reading and writing skills are developed well across the school. Pupils make good progress in reading. They use their phonics knowledge well to read unfamiliar words. They also use clues in the text to work out the meanings of words that they do not understand. Work in pupils' books shows that pupils make good and sometimes better progress in writing. Years 1 and 2 pupils, for example, used appropriate terminology to write about their visit to Tamworth Castle. Their writing articulately expressed how much they enjoyed dressing up as knights and servants and demonstrated how much they had learned about life in medieval times.
- Staff teach pupils to hold pencils correctly, to write on lines and to join letters neatly. As a consequence, pupils learn how to present their work well and to a high quality. However, my review of pupils' work showed that while pupils present their work neatly in their writing books, this is not always the case in other subjects.
- Pupils have a secure understanding of number and other aspects of mathematics, such as time, shape and measurements. You are aware, and work in pupils' books confirms, that most teachers make sure pupils have the chance to sufficiently deepen their mathematical understanding. However, this is not the case in all classes. This is because a few staff miss opportunities to plan

activities that develop pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills. You are planning to give teachers the chance to share effective practice in this aspect of mathematics.

- In lessons and around school pupils behave well. They show very positive attitudes to learning. Pupils of all ages are keen to take part in class discussions and to respond to adults' questions. During the inspection, pupils wanted to talk to me about their work. They spoke with confidence about their learning and their experiences in different lessons.
- The curriculum regularly provides pupils with memorable experiences. These include visits to places of interest and guest speakers who come and talk to pupils about a variety of topics. More recently, pupils in key stage 1 have been learning about the life cycle of a butterfly by watching caterpillars in their classrooms develop into butterflies. Pupils spoke knowledgeably about the different stages of the life cycle and how to take care of the caterpillars and then the butterflies. On the day of the inspection, the pupils watched with awe as the butterflies were released, spread their wings and flew away freely.
- Pupils enjoy helping others and contributing to improvements in the school. The school council members regularly seek the views of pupils and raise money for charity. Playground leaders help to organise playground games, while the computer monitors help pupils with using technological equipment.
- A good range of after-school clubs give pupils the chance to learn new skills and improve their fitness. Pupils were particularly positive about yoga bugs, tennis, cheerleading, football and rugby. In addition to after-school clubs, staff plan sporting events as part of the school day. The 'Road to Rio Day', for example, gave pupils the chance to experience fencing, boxing, handball and archery and learn about the forthcoming Olympic games.
- The governing body is continually seeking to improve its effectiveness. Governors undertook a review of governance so that they could make sure they were working as efficiently as possible. Following this review, governors refined the way in which they collated and reviewed information so that they could focus more on the impact of leaders' work on pupils' achievement. Members of the governing body ask searching questions and are proactive in finding out information about the school for themselves. As a result, they have a good understanding of the school's strengths and also where further improvements are required.
- You have the confidence of parents. They value the way in which you and the staff take care of their children and help them to learn. The parents who spoke with me were particularly complimentary about the support available for individual children and the efforts that staff go to in order to make learning fun. Parents appreciate the range of opportunities available to them to be involved in the life of the school. These include listening to pupils read, accompanying pupils on school trips, and attending achievement assemblies.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all teachers give pupils the chance to deepen their mathematical understanding by providing activities which develop pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills
- boys and disadvantaged pupils reach even higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics
- teachers make sure that pupils present their work neatly across different subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Usha Devi
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, and the teachers with responsibility for the early years, English and community cohesion. I also met with the chair of the governing body and two other governors. I spoke informally to parents and children. You joined me on brief visits to lessons to observe pupils as they learned and to review work in pupils' writing, mathematics and topic books. I reviewed a range of documentation including records relating to keeping pupils safe, pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching. I took account of 17 responses to the Ofsted staff inspection questionnaire and 42 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View.