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11 April 2016

Monica Paines
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Paines

Short inspection of Long Ditton Infant and Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 8 March 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 October 2010.

This school continues to be good.

You have inspired both staff and parents to support school improvement because you visibly uphold your own high expectations of others. Parents are overwhelmingly confident in you as a leader. A parent has reflected the views of many by saying, 'The headteacher is enthusiastic, responsive and caring, and genuinely has the best interest of children at heart'. Several parents are proud that their children are part of your school, and it is now at the core of the local community. You have ensured that pupils are nurtured and safe while promoting high expectations of academic performance. Leaders have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Pupils enter the school with knowledge, skills and understanding that are broadly typical for children of their age. By the time they leave the school, pupils' achievement is broadly higher than the national average. A high proportion of pupils reach the highest levels of achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. For example, over half of pupils attained above-expected levels for their age by the end of Year 2 in 2015. This is because pupils across the school make at least expected progress from their different starting points and many pupils make accelerated progress. This progress is enabled because staff use assessment information well to ensure that learning activities are well matched to the needs of pupils. This strong achievement could be further enhanced by increasing the number of disadvantaged children who achieve the standards expected for their age at the end of early years and by the end of Key Stage 1.

You know the strengths and areas for development extremely well and lose no time in trying to address areas for improvement. You are supported well by senior leaders and by a positive staff team whose members are single-minded in their drive to provide a high standard of education for pupils. For example, a recent focus on sentence structure has resulted in a significant improvement in pupils' writing ability. The introduction of a programme of mathematical activities to help pupils develop their thinking skills has improved pupils' ability to problem solve in mathematics.

You know what needs to be accomplished to make the school even better. For instance, because you want all pupils to underpin their learning by being proficient readers, you have rightly focused on improving outcomes in pupils' early reading skills, for example by encouraging parents to read regularly at home with their children and by offering a workshop for parents about phonics (the sounds that letters make). The school development plan links closely to leaders' evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. However, the plan lacks milestones against which to measure the progress that leaders are making towards improvement.

You and your staff have worked commendably to meet the recommendations from the previous inspection. The effectiveness of leadership has been strengthened because responsibilities for steering subjects and areas for improvement, such as the introduction of a new assessment tracking system, have been delegated to emerging middle leaders. Middle leaders support your senior leaders competently. They have assisted you in raising the quality of teaching because they are fully involved in monitoring and evaluating the performance of colleagues. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved to become a strength of the school. Learning is well matched to the needs of pupils, including in the early years provision and for the most-able pupils. Pupils are prepared well for the next stage of their education.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. This is fortified by a deeply embedded, caring and nurturing environment which focuses on the well-being and safety of pupils. School staff are acutely aware of their responsibilities to protect pupils because policies are in line with current legislation and shared with staff. The thoroughness of the way that adults are checked when they work or volunteer at the school is highly effective and adults are well trained to understand their responsibility to protect children. Pupils feel safe at the school and this view is supported by parents and staff. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and have a clear understanding of how to use the internet safely. School governors support and strengthen safeguarding procedures by monitoring the school's work and by completing an annual audit of safeguarding procedures.

School leaders are diligent in their efforts to ensure equality of opportunity and in ensuring that pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development underpins the values of the school. For example, a recent survey revealed that pupils were developing stereotypical attitudes about gender, such as the colours girls prefer or jobs that are suited to men or to women. Leaders made an immediate response and invited visitors to the school to challenge these emerging attitudes of pupils. Leaders promote British values. An example of this is the conversion of the school council to become a school parliament which acts on the views of pupils.

Inspection findings

- You have inspired a culture of high expectations and enthusiasm that has permeated the school and is impacting positively on the academic and emotional needs of pupils. A parent verbalised this by stating that, 'My child has an absolute joy in learning, feels very safe, and feels that nothing is unachievable. This is clearly as a result of the teaching and guidance that he has received at the school'.
- Pupils are polite and considerate towards each other. They take responsibility for themselves and others, for example, by being 'buddies' and by striving to win the 'Golden Peg' award, which helps pupils to remember to hang up their belongings on their peg. Pupils communicate well because their speaking skills are developed in a range of ways. For instance, pupils understand the purpose of 'talk partners' to share ideas and learn from each other. Pupils of all ages are inquisitive and enjoy learning.
- Behaviour is typically good in lessons, although there are some examples where pupils take too long to move between activities and are too slow to respond to requests made by adults. Adults do not consistently expect pupils to demonstrate their very best attitudes towards their learning in order that learning time is maximised. Incidents of bullying, use of derogatory language and serious breaches in behaviour are exceptionally rare. If they do occur, they are dealt with effectively by school leaders.
- Leaders have ambitious expectations for pupils' outcomes. They have taken account of the fact that the standards expected by the end of each academic year have risen. Leaders have made a speedy response by developing a bespoke assessment system that tracks the progress and achievement of pupils against the new curriculum. Staff are using this to plan lessons that meet the needs of pupils. The vast majority of pupils make good progress as a result. This could be developed further so that leaders are able to evaluate the proportion of pupils who are making more than expected progress. This would also help leaders to identify precisely how much progress is required for pupils who are falling behind in their learning to catch up with their peers.

- Historical performance information about the achievement of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding does not reflect the depth of the school's intervention in this area to raise achievement for this group of pupils. Leaders are committed to equality and have instilled high expectations among all staff. The number of eligible pupils in the school is well below the national average and the number in some classes is extremely small. This makes it difficult to compare the outcomes for this group of pupils over time. In addition, a high number of eligible pupils have additional educational needs. All eligible pupils make progress. Eligible pupils who do not have additional needs make good progress and are catching up with the achievement of their peers.
- The impact of additional government funding is analysed thoroughly to make sure that interventions are making a difference. You have undertaken an audit of the school's practice and become part of a county-wide project to ensure that improvements in achievements are accelerated for this disadvantaged group. Despite your considerable efforts, there is a notable gap between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils nationally. You know that this is an essential area for improvement and have already implemented important strategies and partnerships to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.
- Pupils are taught the sounds that letters make, known as phonics, highly effectively. Pupils are able to spell difficult words, such as 'foolishly' and 'stupidly', confidently and accurately. They understand the meaning of words and can offer a range of alternative words that mean the same thing. Pupils are able to use new words in sentences orally. Work in books shows the wide range of vocabulary used by pupils in their writing. Pupils have secure grammatical knowledge. When asked by a teacher what type of words 'play', 'listen' and 'walk' are, a Year 1 pupil responded by saying, 'I think they are verbs because they are things you can do'. A small number of pupils do not share their ideas with their talk partners in phonics lessons, and as a result, are not as confident to contribute to discussions and answer questions. The number of pupils who will reach the expected standard in the phonics screening test in Year 1 is predicted to rise above the national average in 2016 following an uncharacteristic fall in outcomes in 2015.
- The most-able pupils are challenged because work is closely matched to their needs. Their learning is tailored to help them think more deeply and apply what they know in a range of ways. Work in books and observations in lessons demonstrate the good progress they make in reading, writing and mathematics. For instance, the most-able pupils write at length and use a range of complex sentences enhanced by rich vocabulary and precise punctuation.

- Learning is fun across a range of subjects. During this inspection, the whole school was engaged in scientific activities. On the previous day, fertile chicken eggs had arrived at the school and were due to hatch during the week. This grabbed the pupils' imagination and created a 'buzz' for learning. Pupils in Year 1 excitedly wrote about the chick's egg tooth. Children in Reception class created illustrated books about chicks hatching out of their shells. Children in the Nursery experimented to see what would happen to an egg when it is immersed in water, oil, vinegar or orange juice overnight. The teacher confidently stated that the egg in vinegar would bounce in the morning like a rubber ball! A parent communicated their feelings by saying, 'The teachers understand children and know how to make learning fun. Our child looks forward to the rich and varied activities and events that regularly take place at the school'.
- The early years provision is well led, and consequently, there have been significant improvements in the overall quality of provision. There is a greater emphasis on children leading their own learning because the environment is well structured to allow them to do so. Children enjoy coming to school. A parent captured this by saying about her child, 'She is happy and excited to go every day and has made great progress in developing confidence and skills'. Children are engaged and motivated in all areas of learning. For instance, during this visit children pretended to be animals in an area for role play constructed to look like a zoo. They strengthened their gross motor skills by riding on tricycles outdoors. Many children chose to write books about how chicks hatch from eggs. They are effective communicators and are able to explain clearly what they were doing and why. Children are proud of their classroom and play nicely together. They have a good understanding of risk, and know whom to ask if they need help. Children receive a very good start to their education and are well prepared for Year 1.
- Parents are extremely positive about the school. They particularly value the accessibility and visibility of school leaders at the beginning and end of the school day. Parents appreciate the extent to which staff go beyond what is expected of them, for example, through supporting parents as well as pupils and by giving up weekends to rehearse the annual pantomime in which staff perform. Parents feel that their opinions and support are valued and that they are encouraged to be part of their children's education.
- Leaders have worked hard to increase the proportion of pupils who attend school every day. You have ensured that strategies are in place to address historic poor attendance and the persistent absence of a small number of pupils. You have been resilient when addressing this important issue with parents who occasionally want to take holiday during term time. In addition, you provide rewards for pupils who attend well and, moreover, provide exciting lessons and experiences to ensure that pupils want to come to school. Consequently, there are encouraging signs that attendance is improving; attendance this academic year is above the national average for primary schools. This is a heartening starting point for the school to build upon. However, despite some improvement this year, attendance for vulnerable groups, such as pupils with special educational needs or disability, remains below that of their peers.

- Governors add to the capacity of leaders to improve the school further. They ask searching questions about how the work of the school could be improved. They provide challenge and support because they clearly understand the school's strengths and weaknesses. This is because leaders are transparent and governors seek to find out information for themselves. Governors take their responsibility to safeguard pupils very seriously and discharge their strategic duties well.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to close gaps in achievement for groups of pupils, especially those eligible for pupil premium funding
- ensure that staff maintain high expectations of pupils' learning behaviours, such as listening well to others, so that learning behaviours are as good as the best examples in the school
- continue to work with parents to bring attendance in line with, or above, the national average for primary schools.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Surrey County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Abigail Birch
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the deputy headteacher (who is also the special educational needs coordinator), the early years leader, those responsible for safeguarding, the English leader (who is also responsible for assessment), the school business manager and six members of the governing body. We visited all Nursery classes, and classes in all year groups throughout the school. I spoke to pupils in lessons, took account of the 85 responses made by pupils on the online pupil questionnaire, and met with them formally to gather their views. I looked at their work in a range of subjects. I took account of the 109 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 97 written contributions from parents which were also made online. I also took account of a letter given to me by a parent during the inspection. I spoke to a number of parents at the start of the school day. I considered the views of the 25 staff members who completed the online staff questionnaire. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including information about school improvement and pupils' achievement, and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. I also looked at and discussed with you the evaluation of the school's effectiveness.