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8 September 2017

Karen Puszczynska
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Dear Mrs Puszczynska

Short inspection of Portway Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 4 July 2017, 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Following that inspection, an acting headteacher was in post for some time before you took up your appointment in January 2017. There has also been an increase in the number of pupils on roll. The values of the school are prominently articulated and parents and pupils alike hold the school in high esteem. Relationships across the school community are highly positive. Parents I spoke with during the inspection told me that there is considerable support for the team of highly committed staff and for the changes you have made since you took up your post.

Leaders are working effectively to create an atmosphere where pupils can achieve their potential and celebrate their achievements in a range of areas of school life. The school is starting to explore the opportunities presented by partnership with a local teaching school. Teachers could, however, benefit further from more targeted training and development on the specific priority areas. The school has achieved a range of quality marks and awards for its work, including the Eco Schools Award and Artsmark Gold.

Pupils benefit from a rich and well-designed curriculum and their levels of engagement in learning are high. The school has established positive attitudes to learning with the aid of a pupil-friendly leaflet and a carefully considered system of rewards and sanctions. Pupils are full of praise for their teachers and keen to discuss their experiences of school. There is a purposeful learning culture in all classrooms and pupils are encouraged to take pride in the school's competitive success in the areas of sport and music.

Leaders have successfully tackled the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report by implementing a focused approach to the development of grammar, punctuation and spelling. Pupils' results in reading and spelling tests at the end of key stage 2 show the positive impact of systematic planning in these areas. Teachers have high expectations of the presentation of work across all areas of the curriculum and this is evident in the quality of work in pupils' books. The introduction of a new assessment system has enabled teachers to make robust evaluations of attainment and progress, which are understood both by parents and by pupils.

Teachers encourage pupils to use a drafting process to improve the quality of their written work across a range of subjects, and the school takes pride in the display of high-quality work. Rigorous monitoring systems ensure that teachers are held to account for the pace of improvement in pupils' learning. Pupils speak confidently about how well they are doing and are highly appreciative of the various levels of support on offer.

Leaders recognise the challenges facing teachers aiming to move pupils to achieve at greater depth. Partnerships with key local organisations, for example Derby County Football Club, are inspiring children to read and write with enthusiasm, creativity and at greater length. This strategic planning of broader opportunities for writing has led to improved standards, with a higher proportion of pupils meeting, or going beyond, the expected standard.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders place a high priority on all aspects of safeguarding and have developed a clear culture of shared responsibility. Arrangements are securely in place to promote a culture of vigilance and early response. The appointment of a highly committed inclusion manager ensures that cross-agency working is effective and the progress of actions is monitored. You and other staff have well-developed relationships with families and it is clear that you take pride in understanding and meeting the specific needs of pupils. The school has a full range of policies designed to ensure that staff are confident in caring for children and promoting high standards of behaviour and conduct. The governing body plays a full role in ensuring that these policies are regularly reviewed. Rigorous checks are also made on the suitability of all staff and volunteers to work with children.

Members of staff undertake regular training relevant to child protection and safeguarding, such as raising awareness of the risks of extremism, the importance of equality and the possible signs associated with children missing from education.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have identified specific barriers to achievement in mathematics and improved the school's focus on teaching arithmetic and reasoning. Their rigorous scrutiny of teachers' planning has ensured that pupils are set work which provides the right level of challenge. A dedicated link governor for mathematics is also providing valuable support. As a result, a greater proportion of pupils are making the expected progress. Leaders

recognise that the girls are still not doing as well as boys in mathematics and are identifying suitable interventions to remedy this.

- The school has emphasised the need to maximise attendance in its drive to raise standards further. The work of the inclusion manager in building relationships with families has ensured that they remain at or above national levels. Attendance rates of disadvantaged pupils continue to lag behind that of their peers, but are rising.
- Senior leaders and the governing body have an accurate view of the school's performance. They use this to plan actions that are designed to improve the school further. Leaders are held to account in a timely manner against specific objectives. The development of opportunities for outdoor learning is one example of the creative approach to school improvement, with plans to enhance the positive working relationship with the infant school that shares the school's site.
- Leaders have implemented action plans to raise achievement in English and mathematics. As a result, teachers are planning activities that lead to more effective learning. Leaders now recognise the importance of focusing on subject-specific issues related to the teaching of reading and writing. To do this, planned changes to roles and responsibilities in September 2017 have been designed so that priorities are clearly identified and actions tracked carefully to check their impact.
- The rich and varied curriculum offer ensures that pupils gain entry to a range of worlds and engage with important questions. Further opportunities to use cross-curricular learning promote extended writing and strengthen pupils' problem-solving skills in subjects outside English and mathematics.
- The governing body holds leaders to account for the school's use of the pupil premium. A well-designed strategy identifies the barriers to learning facing disadvantaged pupils and includes relevant actions for improvement. The recent external evaluation of the impact of this work has supported the school to identify, and then implement, specific interventions designed to maximise progress. However, leaders and governors do not track the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils as well as they could. In particular, they are not clear enough about the impact of additional support and extra-curricular activities on the most able disadvantaged pupils and this potentially limits their achievements over time.
- Leaders have begun to seek opportunities to engage in partnership work with other schools in order both to explore key areas of interest for staff and pupils and to share best practice with other colleagues. There are further opportunities to develop this work that are currently under consideration.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they track the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils more carefully to identify where additional support or intervention is needed, particularly for those who are most able
- teachers focus clearly on maximising girls' progress in mathematics so that they reach standards as high as those achieved by boys

- teachers' access to examples of best practice in teaching and learning is improved by enhancing the range of training opportunities available through partnerships with other schools and professionals.

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

Yours sincerely

Emma Hollis-Brown
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

When we met at the start of this inspection, I shared with you the main areas of focus for the inspection. We discussed the changes to the school's context and the improvements made since the last inspection. We agreed to look closely at the progress of pupils in writing and mathematics, with particular focus on disadvantaged pupils. Prior to the inspection, I checked the school's website to ensure that it meets current requirements for the publication of documentation.

During the inspection, the school's new intake of pupils for September 2017 was visiting the school, and pupils in Year 6 were visiting their new secondary schools. Consequently, we carried out a learning walk together in a range of classrooms in Years 3 to 5. Together with the deputy headteacher, we reviewed a sample of pupils' work from across Years 3 to 6 and considered their attainment and progress in reading, writing, mathematics and other subjects.

I met with a group of pupils drawn from Years 3 to 5 and discussed their experience of school life. I observed their behaviour and conduct around the school and how children interacted at lunchtime. I met with the chair of the governing body and three other governors. I also met with the subject leads for English and mathematics and the pupil premium coordinator. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's development plan.

We discussed a range of aspects of the school's safeguarding work, scrutinised documentation and reviewed records of the checks made on the suitability of staff to work with children.

I considered 40 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and reviewed the responses of staff to a questionnaire completed during the inspection. I also spoke with parents as they dropped their children off at the start of the school day.