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2 April 2019

Mrs Alison Dodd
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Dear Mrs Dodd

Short inspection of Stepping Stones School

Following my visit to the school on 19 March 2019 with Claire Hollister, Ofsted inspector, 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 outstanding in March 2015.

This school continues to be outstanding.

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

You and the very effective management committee have led and managed a number of changes with great purpose and with an extremely positive impact. The local authority has provided funding to improve the school's premises and accommodation. This meant that you had to relocate for a period of time during the last academic year. A large number of new staff have also been recruited since the last inspection. Throughout these changes, leaders have continued to ensure that the provision for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs has always been at the forefront of school improvement.

The areas requiring further development identified at the last inspection were successfully incorporated into the school development plan. The management committee has monitored the work of leaders to improve provision in terms of pupils' progress and enjoyment of reading. They have also looked closely at the progress of the most able pupils in different subjects compared to the national averages. Reading is clearly at the heart of all lessons. Pupils recognise the importance of reading as part of their development as independent writers. The less able pupils make use of their knowledge and understanding of phonics to read and learn to spell new words. The most able pupils read books and then write enthusiastic reviews of what they have read. A large proportion of pupils overcome significant barriers to make outstanding progress in reading, writing and mathematics from their starting points on arrival at the school.

The management committee ensures that any pupil premium funding or sports funding is used wisely. All pupils, including the most able, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged, are able to engage in a wide range of curriculum activities, both in and out of school. All pupils benefit from individual education programmes, which help them to overcome significant barriers to their good attendance and learning. Pupils make wonderful headway in their attendance, learning, social, emotional and behavioural development.

Very effective partnerships have been established with a number of local primary mainstream schools, through the school's outreach team. As a result of the strong leadership of this team, extremely helpful support is offered for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion. The team also provides a range of invaluable, professional support programmes for mainstream teachers, teaching assistants and the local authority behaviour mentors. According to records from the previous academic year, 100 pupils, who were previously at risk of exclusion, maintained their mainstream placements. These outcomes demonstrate leaders' exceptional capacity and potential for consistently meeting the needs of pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a strong safeguarding culture at the school. This is underpinned by the importance the staff and the management committee place on keeping updated on any national or local changes to regulations about and/or strategies for keeping children safe in education. For example, leaders maintain close contact with the police so that intelligence can be shared around social networking concerns in the locality. In this way, pupils at risk and their parents and carers receive rapid support, advice and guidance where needed.

Staff spoken with say any updated training they receive leads to them becoming more alert to pupils' safeguarding needs. Through careful observation and sharing of concerns during staff briefings, they can respond in a timely way.

There is clear evidence that child protection concerns are formally recorded and followed up effectively, often in partnership with social services or other agencies. Pupils learn how to keep safe, including on the internet, through their lessons in personal, social, health and citizenship lessons.

The views of stakeholders through recent questionnaire surveys and discussions with pupils and parents confirm that pupils are and feel safe in school. Risk assessments are also in place to ensure that pupils are kept safe when attending off-site educational visits.

Inspection findings

- Classrooms are welcoming. Staff teams work seamlessly together so pupils know what the expectations are about learning and behaviour. Displays are bright and unspoilt. They provide a constant celebration and reminder of pupils' efforts and achievements, for example in reading and writing. Pupils' work is well presented. They take pride in their work and want to share it with staff and visitors. All classrooms, corridors and the school hall are equally bright, nurturing and welcoming.
- Staff promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development at every opportunity. They also focus strongly upon pupils' knowledge and understanding of the British values of respect, tolerance and the rule of law. For example, pupils are taught to reflect upon their behaviour and its impact upon others. Staff have an agreed approach to this during lesson times and in a daily whole-school assembly.
- Pupils develop strong self-management skills. They learn to recognise when they are upset, sad or angry. They are able to choose a time-out session without upsetting the flow of lessons. They show an increasing ability to talk about their feelings, rather than act out their anger or unhappiness. Very soon, they settle and return to learning. Such work is underpinned by the invaluable support of the educational psychologist and speech therapist.
- Inspectors found that all pupils improve their attendance once they start to attend the school. Parents responding to the free parent-text system wrote comments such as, 'He is making better progress than in any other school' and 'I love this school.'
- In lessons, inspectors observed pupils taking turns and being polite when talking to each other or staff. They show interest and curiosity, for example when an inspector was asked by pupils to observe some frogspawn in an outdoor area.
- Pupils behave well in different contexts. For instance, they collaborate and socialise at breaktime. They are content to share a tricycle, play football together or play chase games. Staff supervision is always strong. All staff have excellent behaviour management skills.
- Pupils have extremely positive attitudes and engage well in lessons. They are keen to respond to questions posed by knowledgeable subject teachers, for example when working on their understanding of how to recognise the difference between 10s and units in mathematics. Teachers plan well for individual pupils' needs and abilities, for example when teaching about how pupils can use adjectives in their independent writing. The less able pupils are taught to see the links between what they see and the descriptive words they might use.
- Leaders have developed an agreed system for assessing pupils' abilities when they enter the school. Teachers set challenging targets for each pupil. The progress made is carefully monitored by leaders, especially in relation to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- All staff have high expectations of the pupils. Leaders have ensured that there is an enriching and stimulating curriculum, which excites and motivates pupils.

Inspectors found that workbooks and folders across subjects, such as art, science and geography, showed a consistency in pupils' interest and pride in their work. Teaching assistants provide short reward activities for pupils at the end of most days. Among others, these activities include music, dance and cookery.

- The school's stated curriculum policy is borne out in practice, especially in the promotion of reading and writing skills across different subjects. Currently, there is limited evidence of pupils developing mathematical reasoning skills or an awareness that the mathematics they learn has relevance to their everyday lives.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils make even more progress in mathematics by providing them with more opportunities for problem-solving in different subjects and contexts, and an awareness that mathematics has relevance in their everyday lives

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

Yours sincerely

Jon Ashley
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, the team met with you and two senior leaders. Inspectors conducted joint observations of lessons in each of the classes with you and the deputy headteacher. A meeting was held with five management committee members, including the chair and vice-chair. A telephone conversation was held with the school's adviser. Inspectors looked at pupils' work books, folders and classroom displays. They observed pupils' conduct and attitudes on the school corridors and at breaktime. Inspectors considered a range of documentation, including the school's review of its strengths and areas to develop, the school development plan and information about pupils' ability levels, progress and outcomes. They also looked at documentation relating to safeguarding, including safe recruitment of staff and risk assessments, behaviour and attendance, and management committee reports and minutes of its meetings. They considered a recent written report about the school from the external adviser. Inspectors spoke informally with pupils during breaktime. An inspector observed a whole-school assembly. An inspector met formally with a group of pupils to seek their views about the school. An inspector met with a parent and a grandparent. There were no responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents. However, inspectors considered 10 responses to the parents' free-text system. There were no

responses to the pupils' online survey, but inspectors considered a recent questionnaire survey conducted with pupils by the school. Inspectors looked at 19 responses to the online staff questionnaire.