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17 February 2016

Miss Julia Addison
Acting Head of School
Shirley Infant School
Wilton Road
Southampton
SO15 5LA

Dear Miss Addison

Short inspection of Shirley Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 26 January 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in May 2011.

This school continues to be good.

Leaders have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Despite the absence of the executive headteacher and head of school, you have maintained a clear vision for the continued improvements that you want to make so that the school can become outstanding in the future. Actions taken to raise pupils' achievement have been successful. Staff feel valued and are proud to work in the school. Parents support leaders' commitment to developing children's leadership skills and their creativity alongside their academic achievements. Parents welcome leaders' approach to making the curriculum exciting and engaging for their children, saying that 'there is always something really exciting going on'. One parent commented that leaders are 'constantly looking to improve engagement and are in no way complacent'.

Pupils enjoy school and achieve well because leaders make successful improvements. Leaders have made positive changes; for example, to the way that learning is organised in the early years so that more children secure a good level of development. In addition, training has improved teachers' subject knowledge and their ability to address gaps in pupils' skills successfully in writing and mathematics. Consequently attainment is rising in these subjects. You and other senior leaders focus closely on ensuring all pupils make the progress that they should. You have made sure that pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs continue to receive quality support and make good progress. In addition, you ensure that pupils with English as an additional language achieve very well. Overall, pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics is good.

At the last inspection, inspectors identified the need to remove inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. In addition, inspectors recommended that the members of the governing body sharpen the impact of their evaluations, including their understanding and use of performance information. Leaders have tackled these areas effectively so that:

- teaching is consistent because leaders provide excellent support for both existing and new staff
- teaching has a positive impact so that most pupils make good progress and achieve well
- governors challenge and support leaders well, accurately using a wide range of information to support their evaluation of the impact of leaders' work.

Although pupils achieve well overall in reading, writing and mathematics, the teaching of reading is not yet consistently meeting the needs of disadvantaged pupils so that they reach the expected standard at the end of Key Stage 1. In early years, while the majority of children secure a good level of development, disadvantaged children do not always begin Year 1 with all of the skills they need.

Leaders in subjects other than English and mathematics know their subjects well and have ensured teachers' subject knowledge is strengthened through effective training and development. However, their evaluation of pupils' achievement is not yet being used to pinpoint actions to secure good or better progress for pupils in their subjects.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that all staff have a good understanding of the latest national guidance and know the procedures they should follow if they are concerned about any pupil. All acting senior leaders hold recently updated and relevant qualifications. Leaders have a clear grasp of their new duties and are vigilant in their identification of any pupils that may be at risk of harm.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff follow up concerns swiftly and pre-employment checks on staff meet requirements. Parents and staff are united in their view that pupils are safe in school. There are well-planned opportunities for pupils to learn to keep themselves safe, including e-safety. Leaders understand the importance of following up any absence promptly. Consequently, attendance is above the national average. No pupils are persistently absent. Some families, who have in the past found it difficult to ensure their children attend school as often as they should, are successfully supported by the family support worker and their attendance has risen.

Inspection findings

- The executive headteacher has developed a culture where professional enquiry and continuous learning for staff are embedded within the fabric of the school. Interim leaders were able to step seamlessly into their new roles and confidently continue to lead planned improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the school.
- Parents are deeply appreciative of the rich educational experience that the school provides and feel well informed about their children's learning. Parents say they value the 'true feeling of partnership' and regular opportunities to find out what is going on through weekly emails, information evenings and curriculum events. They say that they benefit from and enjoy the workshops that leaders provide across a range of subjects including English, information and communication technology and personal, social, health and economic education.
- Most pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics across all year groups. Their attainment at the end of the early years and Key Stage 1 is above national averages.
- Leaders have improved the range and quality of activities in early years so that children's development in all areas of learning has strengthened. Three quarters of children in early years achieved a good level of development last year compared to just over half in 2013. During observations, children showed confidence in their independent learning. For example, some scored a game by recording the points accurately, while others debated which pet their character would like to have in their online house. A group of children used 'Floam' and 'Moonsand' to consider differences in the materials. One child said 'This is bumpy and that one is smooth – feel it. I like the shape I have made because it is a star.'
- Despite these positive changes in early years, teachers are not using their observations in some areas of learning to identify and address gaps for some disadvantaged children. Consequently some of these children do not start Year 1 as strongly as they should.
- The teaching of writing and mathematics in Key Stage 1 has improved as a result of effective training and development provided by senior leaders. Consequently pupils' achievement is rising and the gaps between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally in writing and mathematics are closing. However, improvements to teaching have not extended to reading as successfully. Teaching does not focus closely enough on developing the reading strategies that disadvantaged pupils need so that they meet the standards expected of them by the end of key Stage 1.
- Creative curriculum planning ensures that learning is fun and meaningful for pupils. Staged 'incidents', such as an alien spaceship landing in the playground, are used to spark imagination and provide exciting first-hand experiences to enrich the quality of pupils' writing. In addition, pupils' writing shows improving technical accuracy because grammar skills are taught regularly. Pupils in Year 2, for example, skilfully analysed the poem 'The

Perfect Potion' for verbs, nouns and also alliteration. They confidently debated what kind of a word they thought 'galaxy' might be.

- Governors' evaluative skills have strengthened as a result of training and support from the multi-academy trust. Governors review performance information regularly and check that leaders' planned actions successfully improve pupils' achievement. Twice as many disadvantaged pupils secured the expected standard in phonics last year than in 2014 because governors ensured leaders made improvements to the way that phonics was taught. In addition, governors checked that teaching and additional support for pupils with English as an additional language met their needs. These pupils achieved outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics above those of other pupils nationally in 2015.
- Teachers leading on non-core subjects such as history and art have good subject knowledge, which they use well to provide 'expert' support for other staff. However, their evaluation of pupils' achievement is at an early stage and is not yet used to pinpoint actions which will secure good or better progress for pupils.
- Pupils have a wide range of opportunities to develop their sense of responsibility, such as Eco Warrior and Sports Leader, which they enjoy. They participate well in decision making. For example, they were influential in improving seating in the school library and worked with school leaders to reshape the school's vision. School council elections are supported by members of the Southampton City Council election team, who set up mini booths and provided voting slips so that pupils could experience an authentic election.
- Strong values, underpinned by the UNICEF Rights of the Child, are embedded in the culture of the school. A focus on the value of 'perseverance' through teachers' endeavours to master a new skill, such as juggling scarves and spinning plates, has helped pupils to carefully consider the skills they need to employ when something is difficult to do.
- Behaviour is good throughout the school, particularly during lesson time. Pupils willingly put the needs of others before themselves, sharing considerately and managing any minor disputes with confidence and maturity.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the teaching of reading addresses the needs of disadvantaged pupils so that they reach age-related expectations by the end of Key Stage 1
- observations in early years are used to focus teaching on any weaknesses in children's knowledge, skills and understanding so that more disadvantaged children secure a good level of development
- leaders' evaluation of pupils' achievement is used to pinpoint actions that secure good or better progress for pupils across a widened range of subjects.

Yours sincerely

Abigail Wilkinson

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, other leaders, pupils and four governors including the Chair of the Governing Body. I also met with a representative of the Hamwic trust. I visited all nine classes with you and observed pupils' work. Together, we looked at a sample of 'learning journeys' and guided reading records. We also heard six pupils read and talked to them about their reading. I took account of 20 responses to the online staff survey and 73 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. In addition, I considered a further 39 written comments from parents. I spoke with a group of pupils from across the school. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including leaders' checks on pupils' current performance, leaders' checks on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and safeguarding policies and procedures. I reviewed the school's work to support pupils' personal and social development. I discussed your own evaluation of the school's performance with you.