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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Kristian Hewitt
Headteacher
The Mary Bassett Lower School
Bassett Road
Leighton Buzzard
Bedfordshire
LU7 1AR

Dear Mr Hewitt

Short inspection of The Mary Bassett Lower School

Following my visit to the school on 22 November 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since you took up post in February 2016, you have made a determined effort to iron out inconsistencies in provision.

You have built an effective leadership team. You, other school leaders and your governing body have established good systems for checking the quality of provision. This means that your priorities are the right ones. Your work to improve attainment, especially at the end of Year 4, is beginning to bear fruit and pupils' progress is improving more quickly in the current year than in the past.

Where needed, you have taken difficult decisions to improve provision. The strategic redeployment of staff in the current year is one of the main reasons why progress has picked up so much, especially in the early years. Consequently, the foundations required to move the school forward are now firmly in place and the capacity for further improvement is clear to see.

Staff work together well to support the diverse community you serve. Your work to nurture pupils' personal development is commendable and is greatly appreciated by parents. Adults are quick to identify pupils' emotional and health needs and they take the right steps to seek additional help where it would be beneficial.

It was a pleasure to meet and speak to your pupils. They talk happily about their work. Pupils are keen to do well and to take responsibility. They like the school's rewards systems, especially the opportunity to win a 'Golden Ticket' or to take part in a 'Headteacher's Tea Party'. Pupils enjoy coming to school and behave sensibly in lessons and when moving around the school site.

You and your staff focus well on 'The Mary Bassett Way' and it is reflected in all aspects of school life. One pupil summed up what this means to them by commenting that, 'It is about being kind, getting along with each other, behaving well and trying our best.'

Most parents speak positively of the work of the school and would recommend it to others. Typical comments include 'I am very pleased with my children's progress but my main concern is happiness and they have never been happier' and 'The Mary Bassett values are alive and encouraged by the teachers and the general ethos of the school.'

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. There is a strong culture of keeping pupils safe across the school. The governing body carries out regular checks to make sure that the school is following best safeguarding practice.

Parents and pupils feel that safety is good in school. Pupils' illnesses or occasional accidents at playtime are dealt with sensitively and calmly by staff. Adults keep good records of the actions they have taken.

Pupils know how to avoid danger outside of school. They are able to talk confidently about road safety after a recent assembly and have a clear understanding of how to avoid problems when using the internet. Pupils know who to turn to if they have a worry. They are confident that any concerns would be tackled quickly. As one commented, 'We all look after each other.'

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we met together to confirm the focuses for my day in school.
- My first focus was the quality of provision in the early years. I wanted to look at this because the previous inspection had identified inconsistencies in provision and, in 2017, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development in the early years was below average.
- I found that the newly appointed early years leader is already having a good impact on provision. The youngest children, including the two-year-olds, get off to a good start in the pre-school setting. They are given high-quality support that helps them to settle quickly and to learn new skills. Provision in the Reception classes now builds on this well.

- Recent improvements in the Reception classes include making outdoor learning more purposeful and ensuring that there is a stronger focus on introducing early writing skills. The good effect of these initiatives is seen in the willing way that boys and girls use clipboards to make notes when working in the mud garden or in the role-play areas.
- I also looked at the progress of key stage 1 pupils in writing. This was because attainment in writing has historically been lower than in reading and mathematics.
- When looking at current pupils' books and in-school data on their progress, I could see that, while there is an improving picture, the gap remains too large. You have made a good start to improving attainment in writing by, for example, providing more support outside lessons to help pupils develop specific skills. This is beginning to have a positive effect. However, we agreed that, in some classes, pupils do not get enough opportunities to write at length in English or to support their learning in other subjects.
- My third line of enquiry looked at how well teachers meet the differing needs of pupils in lessons. This was identified as a weakness in the last inspection report.
- I found that teaching meets the needs of different groups of children more successfully than in the past. Teaching assistants are deployed well to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You have established a good programme of additional interventions to support pupils who are in danger of falling behind.
- After visiting some lessons and looking at books, we agreed that teachers continue to miss opportunities to move on the learning of the most able more quickly when, for example, pupils have completed a task and are ready for their next steps.
- My final line of enquiry looked at the support given to disadvantaged pupils that is funded by the pupil premium. This was a focus for the inspection because there has been a gap between the attainment of these pupils and others in the school by the end of Year 4.
- I am reassured that you take good account of the needs of disadvantaged pupils. You have thorough systems to support the early identification of their needs and they are quickly given additional help. This is having an increasingly positive effect in the current year. While not all disadvantaged pupils are on track to reach the expected level for their age by the end of Years 2 or 4, most are now making good progress from their often low starting points.
- After looking at documentation, we agreed that the evaluation of the use of the pupil premium for the last academic year does not focus well enough on the impact of different initiatives. This makes it difficult for you to be certain about what is working well and what needs to improve when it comes to deciding how to allocate the pupil premium in future years.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the gap between attainment in reading and writing is closed more quickly
- work provides a consistently good level of challenge to the most able
- they analyse and report in more detail how the pupil premium is being used to support disadvantaged pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Mike Capper
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Evidence collected on inspection included:

- observations of teaching and learning across the school during learning walks with the headteacher and deputy headteacher
- meetings with school leaders and members of the governing body
- discussions with parents at the start of the school day and the scrutiny of 42 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View
- an analysis of 54 responses to the Ofsted staff survey
- consideration of a range of information supplied by the school, including checks on the quality of teaching, the school's development plan, school policies and records relating to attendance and safeguarding procedures
- listening to some pupils reading in lessons and a scrutiny of school assessment information and pupils' books in different subjects from the current academic year.