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Miss Liz Horrobin
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Dear Miss Horrobin

Short inspection of Ferndale Primary School & Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 30 January 2019 with Caroline Dulon, Her Majesty's 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 predecessor school was judged to be good in January 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

This is a school with a collaborative and inclusive culture. Children are nurtured and supported very effectively, so they thrive and succeed. Staff work hard to help pupils grow in confidence and independence. Throughout the school, there is warmth, care and a genuine commitment to providing the best. Pupils benefit from many exciting and engaging opportunities. The school is lively and colourful and provides a vibrant learning experience in which children's contributions and achievements are celebrated and shared. Children in Year 6 were excited and enthused by the holograms they had created in science. There is also good support for training and development of staff. At all levels, colleagues feel valued and supported. They feel that their views are listened to and respected. Staff are fully consulted about any changes and initiatives which might affect their workload and well-being.

You have tackled the areas for improvement from the last inspection well. Fundamental to the ethos of the school is meeting the needs of pupils and helping them to develop and to achieve. We saw this in lots of different ways. For example, pupils with more challenging behaviour are sensitively supported and helped to succeed. Similarly, the growing numbers of children arriving at school in the early stages of learning English are progressing well. In addition, you are introducing a new approach to providing more challenge in lessons, especially for the most able.

Pupils who spoke to inspectors talked excitedly about how they relished tackling harder questions and showing what they could do. Although there is more to do before this approach is fully embedded across the school, there are good examples in pupils' books of the high-quality work they are producing in response to this initiative.

During this short inspection, we agreed to focus on a small number of important areas of the school's work. First, we agreed to look at children's achievement in the early years. We also considered how well children are helped to read in early years and key stage 1. As pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are a relatively large group in the school, we also looked at the impact of support provided for these pupils. We also explored the quality of the curriculum in key stage 2, including the impact of provision for disadvantaged pupils. Finally, we agreed to look at the impact of leaders and governors on improving the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Indeed, there are many strengths.

Safeguarding is central to the school's work. As in many other areas, effective teamwork and collaboration are strong features of your approach. Staff understand clearly their roles and responsibilities and what to do if they have any concerns. Record-keeping is thorough and detailed and staff training is regularly refreshed and updated. You are not afraid to challenge other agencies, including the local authority, where you have concerns that the actions being taken are not timely or effective enough, or where you believe that thresholds for action have not been applied consistently. External and governor scrutiny also provides useful checks on safeguarding arrangements and procedures.

Parents and pupils are confident that staff will listen and respond to any worries they may have. Work to tackle bullying is particularly strong and pupils believe that staff will deal with any issues of bullying or unkindness quickly and effectively. Recently, the school received an award in recognition of its anti-bullying work. In assemblies, in class and through other activities, pupils learn about staying safe, particularly on mobile devices or when accessing the internet.

Overall attendance has improved slightly this year and is now just below the national average. Similarly, levels of persistent absence have shown a marked improvement since September. This is a result of a systematic and robust approach to tackling pupils' absence from school. You make sure that any potential safeguarding concerns to do with absence are checked carefully and action is taken where necessary.

Inspection findings

- Leadership of early years is strong and there is a good understanding of the statutory requirements in the early years, all of which are met. Teaching and the

curriculum in early years are carefully tailored to children's needs so that they learn and develop well. Staff listen to children and nurture them effectively so that they grow in confidence and independence. In the nursery class, there is an effective focus on communication and literacy in particular. For example, children enjoyed sharing their ideas about the 'evil peas' who were frozen in ice.

- There is an effective range of activities to support children's reading. Children make good progress in reading, mostly through the teaching of phonics, but they are also able to use other strategies to 'decode' words and derive meaning from texts. The use of assessment to pinpoint children's strengths and weaknesses in reading is strong. Staff are acutely aware of the specific needs of children who struggle to read well. Support is carefully adapted to help children to gain confidence and resilience in reading. Over time, the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in the phonics screening check has been at least in line with the national average.
- The support provided for pupils with SEND is strong. There is a wide range of effective provision in place to meet pupils' varying needs. Staff have developed effective strategies for providing support and have high expectations of pupils' learning. Staff work hard to forge productive relationships with parents and carers, recognising that these are essential in supporting pupils to succeed. This is particularly the case at important points of transition, for example where pupils move from early years to more formal learning in key stage 1, or from Year 6 to secondary school.
- However, school leaders do not always have a clear enough understanding of the overall impact of support for pupils with SEND. They do not routinely measure and collate information about the improvements to learning for these pupils. This makes it more difficult for senior leaders and governors to know whether any changes are needed or if the strategies used represent good value for money.
- In key stage 2, leaders are working hard to review the way in which the curriculum is organised and arranged. At the moment, the curriculum pays a good deal of attention to helping pupils make links between different subjects through their topic work, for example learning about the Vikings in history and the countries of Scandinavia in geography. However, this sometimes means that the way topics are covered in the subjects themselves does not enable pupils to learn in depth in that subject. Sometimes, topics are omitted because staff do not have enough time to cover all the content which has been planned. Leaders recognise this weakness and are taking effective steps to tackle it.
- Leaders, governors and the trust are working well together to improve the school. They have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Similarly, curriculum leaders are making an effective contribution to improvements in their subject areas. They are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about how pupils learn. Leaders have recently introduced a new approach to giving pupils feedback about their work. This strategy is helping staff to adjust their teaching quickly to tackle pupils' mistakes and misconceptions as they arise.
- Governors are gaining in confidence in supporting and challenging school leaders about how well the school is doing. They have developed their own action plan

to improve the knowledge and skills they need. However, governors do not have enough information about the impact of some aspects of the school's work, including the effectiveness of pupil premium funding. Leaders' plans for allocating this money do not enable governors to understand or check the impact of funding on disadvantaged pupils' learning and progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to develop governors' skills, knowledge and expertise
- strengthen the plans for using pupil premium funding so that governors and the trust can more easily hold leaders to account for the impact of this funding
- improve the accountability of staff for the impact of support for pupils who have SEND
- further develop the topic-based curriculum to ensure that pupils learn consistently well in all foundation subject areas.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive officer of the Blue Kite multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Swindon. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lee Northern
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors held discussions with you, your senior leaders and with other members of staff. I met with the chief executive officer of the Blue Kite multi-academy trust and with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body of the school. Inspectors spoke formally and informally with pupils at times throughout the school day, including listening to a group of pupils read. We looked at school improvement planning, assessment records, policy documents and at the school self-evaluation. I scrutinised safeguarding records and considered evidence of how well safeguarding arrangements help and protect children and adults at the school. Along with school staff, we visited classes to observe learning and look at examples of pupils' work. We considered parents' responses to the online questionnaire 'Parent View' and an inspector spoke with a small number of parents at the start of the school day. The responses of 49 members of staff to a staff questionnaire were also considered.