

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



27 June 2017

Mrs Christine Ray
Headteacher
Ryhope Infant School Academy
Shaftesbury Avenue
Ryhope
Sunderland
Tyne and Wear
SR2 0RT

Dear Mrs Ray

Short inspection of Ryhope Infant School Academy

Following my visit to the school on 13 June 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in November 2010.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained and improved the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The areas for improvement identified in that inspection have been fully addressed. Standards have been raised in reading, writing and mathematics and maintained at a level consistently above that seen nationally. The school has implemented its preferred approach to assessment and has fully embedded systems to track the progress of individual pupils. Teachers also use their assessment information thoughtfully, so that lessons and resources are skilfully prepared to meet the needs of pupils with different starting points.

You place each child's health and welfare at the centre of your vision. You and your staff firmly believe that children will not learn and progress unless they feel safe, cared for and happy. As a result, you have a well-developed health and well-being strategy which reaches out into the community of Ryhope and supports those families in need. This approach is helping to ensure that parents are active partners in their child's education and support their good attendance. Parents whom I spoke to and the vast majority of those who completed the online questionnaire (Parent View) were full of praise for the staff at the school and for the strong and determined leadership you provide. One parent told me, 'I would recommend this school wholeheartedly. Their teaching is fantastic and the work they carry out with families to support them is excellent.'

Since the school became an academy in 2014, the curriculum has developed considerably. You have skilfully balanced an engaging range of creative topics with sharply focused teaching of basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. Your staff have looked carefully at the increased expectations of the national curriculum and raised the level of challenge in their planning and practice. This is evident, for example, in the Nursery and Reception classes where teachers use a blend of child-initiated approaches and frequent teacher-led sessions. This is ensuring that children quickly acquire a sound grasp of early reading, writing and number skills. Outcomes at the end of the Reception Year have shown a steady improvement over recent years and children are well prepared to begin formal education in Year 1. Some differences remain, however, in the attainment of boys and girls and between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, both in the early years and in key stage 1. All leaders need to focus attentively on addressing these differences.

The governing body has worked closely with you over the last two years to plan the succession arrangements for the leadership of the school. You and the newly appointed headteacher designate have worked closely to ensure a seamless transition to new leadership arrangements from September 2017. You both share a clarity of vision and approach and have the backing and support of your staff. Neither of you, nor the governors, are complacent and you all demonstrate a strong commitment to the continuing improvement of the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the business manager make rigorous checks on all adults who work in the school and ensure that they are fully trained. All members of staff understand the duty on them to safeguard and protect pupils in their care. The health and well-being team manages a challenging workload and skilfully intervenes to provide support for families in need. Effective partnerships with parents are a feature of the school's approach, which helps pupils to thrive in school and make good academic progress.

As headteacher, you take a lead on ensuring that child protection arrangements in the school are effective. Your team ensures that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that detailed records of good quality are maintained. You pursue any concerns you have about a child's safety doggedly. You told me that you are not always satisfied with the quality of response from the local authority when cases are referred to local safeguarding teams. You and the chair of the governing body continue to challenge the local authority regarding these concerns.

Inspection findings

- Highly effective ongoing training and development of teachers and support staff have, over time, secured good-quality teaching across the school. Teachers are skilled at using assessment information to plan lessons that meet the needs of pupils with different starting points. Consequently, pupils of different abilities are challenged and make strong progress. Your relentless focus on ensuring that pupils establish good basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics is reflected in their books. Pupils take pride in their handwriting and develop a broad vocabulary to express their ideas.
- Children enter the Nursery or the Reception classes with varying levels of development. On average, levels of development on entry are below those typical for their age. Good partnerships with parents are fostered and teachers provide an excellent programme of workshops for parents on how to support their child's learning. Sharply focused teaching helps children to make good progress. By the end of the Reception Year, the proportion of children reaching the expected standard has risen over time to be in line with that seen nationally.
- On this inspection, I looked closely at the progress and attainment of different groups of pupils, as in recent years this has been more variable. At the end of the early years and in the Year 1 national phonics screening check, boys' attainment has lagged behind that of girls and disadvantaged pupils have attained less well than other pupils. I found that leaders and governors are well aware of this and have implemented actions across this year to address these inequalities. You have introduced more 'boy-friendly' topics, increased the amount of outdoor learning and ensured more frequent and more formal teaching of basic language and number skills, particularly in the early years. Assessment information for this year shows that these gaps have narrowed for children currently in Reception, although the impact is not yet apparent at the end of Year 2. Further narrowing of gaps in attainment between different groups of pupils remains a priority of the school.
- By the end of Year 2, the proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics has been consistently above the national average. Many pupils make rapid progress and an above-average proportion demonstrate greater depth of understanding than seen nationally. Most pupils quickly develop their reading skills and enjoy reading for pleasure. Regular reading tasks at home and reading sessions every day in school ensure that pupils read a wide variety of books and develop the skills to analyse and draw meaning from the text.

- The school's curriculum successfully supports pupils' strong progress. Their wider development is well supported through the school's personal, social, health and economic development lessons. Pupils have opportunities to consider key issues affecting their safety, personal development and relationships. Personal qualities of resourcefulness, reflectiveness, risk-taking and resilience are actively promoted in lessons and in displays. Parents support work to introduce pupils to the customs and festivals of other cultures and pupils work in the school allotment and fruit garden to grow, harvest and prepare their own food. You are aware that the internet and access to digital media present a risk to pupils' safety and are working to strengthen the teaching and guidance you provide. You also know that there is a lack of curriculum information on the school website, which the government expects you to publish.
- The governors provide strong strategic direction and have acted thoughtfully to manage the transition in leadership arrangements as you approach your retirement this summer. The assistant headteacher, already appointed to take over as headteacher from September, has been well mentored and has increasingly assumed leadership responsibility across the last year. The governors know the school well because they receive detailed reports and make regular visits to gauge the impact of actions you are taking to improve the school. Curriculum leaders provide effective guidance to their teams and ensure that staff are well deployed to meet pupils' needs. However, if the variation in outcomes between different groups of pupils is to be fully tackled, all leaders will need to check on the progress of boys and disadvantaged pupils more assiduously and evaluate more critically the impact of the additional funding the school receives through the pupil premium.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all options are explored to accelerate the progress made by boys and disadvantaged pupils, so that gaps in the attainment of different groups of pupils are eliminated by the end of key stage 1
- curriculum leaders further raise their expectations and sharpen their monitoring to ensure that all pupils make strong and sustained progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you and the assistant headteacher (who will become headteacher from September 2017). We visited classrooms together, spoke to pupils about their learning and sampled some of their books. I met with a group of pupils and listened to some of them read. I looked closely at a selection of books with the early years and Year 2 curriculum leaders. I also met with the chair of the governing body and three other governors to discuss their work in the school. I met with a group of parents and looked at the 60 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) to gather parents' views, and the 30 responses to the online staff survey. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies and other information available on the school website. I focused particularly on the progress of different groups of pupils currently in the school, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and the breadth and balance of the curriculum.