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Mrs Kathryn Thornburn
Principal
Dowson Primary Academy
Marlborough Road
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Cheshire
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Dear Mrs Thornburn

Short inspection of Dowson Primary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 24 April 2019, 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 2016.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Dowson Primary is a happy and purposeful school where high-quality learning experiences go hand in hand with strong and effective care, guidance and support. Since you took over as principal in September 2017, you have developed a culture where all staff feel valued and enjoy working at the school. Staff and governors share your ambitious vision. You and your leadership team are focused on securing the best possible outcomes so that pupils achieve their full potential and are well prepared for secondary school. All members of staff who responded to the Ofsted survey said that school leaders are aspirational for all pupils.

Pupils are polite, confident, considerate and friendly. They have extremely positive attitudes to their work and talk with great enthusiasm about their learning. This contributes to the strong progress that they make. Pupils' behaviour is exceptionally good during lessons and at breaktimes. They get on extremely well with one another and the adults who teach them. Responses to the pupils' survey showed that staff encourage pupils to be respectful towards those from other backgrounds and to treat everyone equally.

Parents and carers are highly supportive of the school's leadership team and the quality of care and support that staff provide for pupils. All of the parents who responded to Parent View said that their children are taught well and that staff regularly provide them with valuable information about pupils' progress. They feel the school is a vibrant and welcoming place where pupils, parents and staff have a true sense of belonging. Parents value the regular opportunities they have to attend workshops on topics such as phonics and behaviour. Parents also recognise the confidence their children have gained in their learning and social development.

You have worked effectively with your leadership team to address the weaknesses that were identified at the previous inspection. School leaders were asked to improve teaching and to further develop the role of subject leaders. The work that I saw in pupils' books showed that you have made excellent progress in improving standards. Although there was a dip in attainment at the end of key stage 2 in 2018, current pupils are making strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics. You have also made good progress in developing the role of subject leaders. They are now playing a more effective role in monitoring and improving their areas of responsibility. However, further work is required in science, geography and history to ensure that pupils develop their knowledge and skills more effectively.

At the previous inspection, you were also asked to strengthen provision in the early years. You have overseen improvements to the quality of teaching in the Nursery and Reception classes. Children now make an excellent start to their school life. You have developed good systems for ensuring that children make a smooth transition into school. The learning environment, both indoors and outside, is attractive and well resourced. Children develop good attitudes to learning and make strong progress. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development was above the national average in 2018.

Safeguarding is effective.

Keeping children safe is central to the ethos of the school. You and your leadership team have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that pupils' safety is given the highest priority. You have ensured that staff receive appropriate safeguarding training and know what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil's welfare or safety. You have also created a strong and effective pastoral support team. The sharp focus the school places on pupils' welfare means that not only are pupils safe but that they attend regularly. Rates of absence are well below the national average and few pupils are persistently absent from school. Pupils told me that they feel safe at school. Pupils also told me that bullying is rare and, when it does happen, teachers act quickly to resolve issues.

The chair of the governing body undertakes regular reviews of the school's safeguarding policies and procedures. This helps to keep safeguarding high on the agenda and ensures that staff remain vigilant.

Inspection findings

- The first line of enquiry that I explored during this inspection was to see what action school leaders have taken to address the dip in attainment at the end of key stage 2 in 2018. The proportions of pupils achieving and exceeding the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics had been above average in the previous two years. However, in 2018, progress in mathematics and reading across key stage 2 was less strong.
- I found clear evidence of high standards in English across the school. School leaders have placed a strong and effective focus on developing pupils' reading. Teachers regularly read with pupils and constantly look for opportunities to develop pupils' vocabulary. Pupils read regularly both at home and in school. The Year 6 pupils with whom I met read fluently with enthusiasm and intonation. They showed a good awareness of different genres and were keen to tell me about their favourite books and authors. I also saw many examples of high-quality written work across year groups. Pupils are given regular opportunities to write at length and for different purposes. Teachers provide precise feedback for pupils on how to improve their work. As a result, current pupils are making strong progress in both reading and writing.
- Teachers provide good levels of challenge for pupils in mathematics lessons. The work that I saw in books showed that the vast majority of pupils are confident and competent when working with number. Teachers regularly challenge pupils to use and apply their mathematical knowledge and skills to solve problems and develop their reasoning skills. As a result, the vast majority of current pupils are working at or above the expected level for their year group. I also looked at the challenge provided for the most able pupils in mathematics. I found clear evidence that this group of pupils are challenged well. In one of the lessons I visited, Year 6 pupils were successfully applying their knowledge of geometry to calculate the size of angles within a range of different quadrilaterals. I saw many examples of challenging activities in pupils' books across all year groups.
- My final line of enquiry was to look at how well pupils are developing their skills, knowledge and understanding in subjects other than English and mathematics. The work that you and your wider leadership team have done in this area is impressive. You have developed a clear plan of the skills and abilities that you want pupils to develop in each area of the curriculum. Improvements have been made in many subjects. I saw many excellent pieces of artwork in pupils' sketch books and in displays around the school. Pupils are confident users of technology, and physical education is also a strength. Progress has also been made in science, geography and history. However, in some classes, teachers do not ensure that learning builds effectively on what pupils already know in these subjects.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils, including the most able, make strong progress in science, geography and history.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Tomkow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the vice-principals, middle leaders and four governors, including the chair of the governing body. I also met with the school's pastoral team and representatives from the multi-academy trust. I visited all classrooms with you to observe teaching and learning. I looked at work in pupils' books and listened to some pupils read. I spoke with a group of Year 6 pupils about their experience of school and observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at dinner time. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the single central record, the school's self-evaluation, the development plan and records relating to the monitoring of teaching and learning. I also took account of the 84 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, the 29 responses to the staff survey and the 74 responses to the pupil survey.