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17 May 2017

Mrs Christine Peden
Headteacher
Pear Tree Mead Academy
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Dear Mrs Peden

Short inspection of Pear Tree Mead Academy

Following my visit to the school on 16 May 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 September 2011.

This school continues to be good.

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

You have successfully created a caring school ethos underpinned by the school's principle to 'inspire, encourage, believe'. Staff and governors share your deeply held ambition that pupils should achieve well and have high aspirations for their future. Pupils are confident, polite and courteous. They spoke enthusiastically about their learning and shared their ambitions for the future. Pupils gave valid reasons for wanting careers in architecture, teaching, dancing or plumbing.

Since becoming headteacher in 2014, there are more pupils on roll. You have increased provision for the Nursery children and you now have two-year-old children in your new pre-school. Additionally, you recently opened new classrooms to accommodate increasing pupil numbers in key stages 1 and 2.

Leaders have ensured that the school has remained stable during this period of change. You have skilfully managed the growth in pupil numbers through your strategy of 'growing your own' teachers using apprenticeships. Pear Tree Mead Academy is an attractive place to work. Your strong commitment to staff well-being is valued. You have healthcare plans in place for them, and staff value the professional support you provide. Adults are proud to work at Pear Tree Mead Academy. All staff who responded to the online Ofsted questionnaire consider the school to be well led and managed.

You have done much work to develop the skills of your middle leaders. This is particularly the case for subject leaders and the effective monitoring and evaluating of subjects other than English and mathematics. There is evidence to suggest that subject leadership is a particular strength of the school, also recognised by the local authority and the school's improvement partner.

Leaders have taken effective action in response to the areas identified for improvement at the time of the previous inspection. For example, pupils now have more opportunities to write for a wide range of purposes. The colourful and bright displays around the school showcase pupils' high quality writing from all year groups. Pupils join up their handwriting from a young age and are proud to receive their 'pen licence'. Pupils present their work carefully, and well.

Leaders are rightly focusing on improving pupil outcomes further so that more pupils reach the higher standards of achievement. However, you recognise that on occasions some teachers are not responding quickly enough when pupils are ready to move on with their learning. This is preventing some pupils from making the progress of which they are capable and achieving as well as they should.

Governors make good use of their breadth of skills and knowledge to support and challenge school leaders well. Governors are very reflective, continually looking at how they can improve their practice. Scrutiny of governor minutes demonstrates that governors undertake appropriate training, ask pertinent questions and challenge senior leaders, particularly about pupil achievement.

You and other leaders strongly recognise the importance of the role of parents, carers and the extended family in their children's education. You have provided many opportunities for parents to get involved with their child's learning. Through events such as parent workshops, learning days and family support, you have successfully engaged and supported a large proportion of the parent community. On the day of the inspection, grandparents were visiting the Nursery to share in the children's learning. Grandparents thoroughly enjoyed this opportunity and told me that the 'school made them feel welcome' and that they were 'proud seeing all that the children are doing'. Parents who have attended your many parent workshops spoke about the valuable support they have received.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have developed a strong safeguarding culture. You have ensured that staff are appropriately trained and receive regular safeguarding updates.

Governors ensure that the school's record of recruitment checks on the suitability of staff is compliant. Many staff are first aid trained and all staff in the early years are paediatric first aid trained. Risk assessments have been carried out where appropriate.

You ensure that records kept for pupils who are at risk or deemed to be vulnerable are meticulously maintained, with appropriate details, actions and resolution. These records demonstrate that when a concern is raised you take timely and proportionate action. You have devised a rigorous monitoring system which ensures effective tracking of concerns and outcomes for vulnerable pupils.

Pupils told me that they felt safe at school, and could clearly explain the difference between bullying and falling out. They could tell me who they would speak to if they had any concerns and were confident that they would be dealt with effectively. Pupils know how to stay safe and are taught well about road safety and internet safety. For example, Year 6 pupils told me how road safety had prepared them for walking to secondary school by heightening their awareness to the importance of concentrating when crossing roads.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. I was particularly focusing on how teachers planned learning that is well matched to the needs of different pupil groups. This was an area for improvement in the previous inspection report.
- You and other leaders are able to explain the progress of individual year groups as well as the progress for individual pupils and different groups of pupils. This has ensured that your school improvement plan is tightly focused on all pupils making as much progress as they should. You have effectively identified groups that are not achieving as well as they should and ensured that catch-up sessions are in place to support pupils' needs. Current information is showing that this is having a positive impact on these pupils' outcomes.
- My second line of enquiry looked at the actions taken by leaders to improve outcomes in reading in the early years and in key stage 1. Attainment in reading was below national expectations for children in Reception at the end of 2016. The school's accurate progress information and my observations confirmed that the teaching of reading and phonics is effective. Pupils who underachieved in reading remain a focus for leaders and teachers, and strategies are in place to help them catch up. School information shows that a high proportion of pupils currently in key stages 1 and 2 are on track to meet age-related attainment.
- I found that early years' leaders were able to demonstrate that assessment in the early years is strong. Leaders take account of where children are in their learning when they join the school and track children's progress rigorously from their starting points.

- Children in the early years are taught effective strategies to read and understand a text. They have regular opportunities to participate in small group guided reading. Teachers are skilful at asking probing questions to help children make links with what they already know. For example, in Reception, when participating in a reading session about pond dipping, children were encouraged to think about the wider meaning of the text. They talked about safety around the water as well as the creatures that they might find in the pond. Assessment information and children's work show that children in the early years make good progress from their individual starting points in reading.
- Although attainment in reading for pupils at key stages 1 and 2 exceeded national figures, some pupils at the end of Year 2 did not make the progress they should have from their individual starting points. You agreed that in some lessons teachers do not move learning on quickly enough for some pupils to ensure that pupils make the most progress they are capable of.
- You have rightly maintained a strong focus on developing pupils' 'love of reading'. You have ensured that the school library is well equipped with a wide variety of books, appealing to boys and girls. Parent volunteers make sure that the library is organised, inviting and ready for the regular visits from the pupils. During the inspection, I listened to Year 2 and Year 3 pupils read. They did so with confidence, fluency and expression. Pupils used effective strategies to sound out unfamiliar words. Additionally, I observed phonic lessons with pupils in Years 1 and 2. Because of pupils' good grasp of phonics' knowledge, pupils were able to say and write 'tricky words' correctly.
- A further line of enquiry focused on pupils' writing. First, because opportunities for pupils to write for a wide range of purposes was a recommendation on the previous inspection report. Second, because too few pupils, typically the most able pupils, reached the higher standard at the end of key stage 2 tests in 2016.
- Pupils typically produce good quality writing. They now have many opportunities to write at length across a range of subjects. This has been a key focus for the school and lesson observations show that pupils consistently apply writing skills taught to other curriculum subjects. Pupils' work and pupils' progress information show that more pupils now make good progress from their starting points. However, you agreed that more pupils should be reaching the higher standards in writing.
- Finally, my last line of enquiry was concerned with poor attendance for some groups of pupils. The school's absence rates for some pupils were above national expectations at the end of 2016. This was notably the case for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Your attendance and inclusion officer shared detailed analysis with me which showed an improving picture, since the start of the current school year, for both of these groups of pupils. The valuable liaison work you and your pastoral team do with families has been pivotal in securing improvement. They were able to show examples of significant improvement in attendance for individual pupils and explain the support which is in place for these pupils and families.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers respond swiftly when pupils are ready to move on in their learning so that pupils can make the most progress they are capable of
- attendance for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities continues to increase.

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

Yours sincerely

Cindy Impey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the senior leader and four governors. I visited all the classrooms. Examples of children's work from this academic year were scrutinised. I observed children's behaviour during activities and as they moved around the school. A number of documents were reviewed, including the school's records of monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning, the single central record, the school's self-evaluation, pupil assessment and progress information and the school improvement plan. I took account of the 61 responses to the online Ofsted questionnaires completed by parents, and 23 texts messages from parents. In addition, 48 responses from staff were considered.