

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs Jo Di-Pede
Headteacher
Ferndown First School
Mountbatten Drive
Ferndown
Dorset
BH22 9FB

Dear Mrs Di-Pede

Short inspection of Ferndown First School

Following my visit to the school on 4 May 2016, 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 2010.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You lead the school with unwavering commitment to ensuring that the quality of education provided continues to improve. Your high expectations have contributed to the effective performance of the school's work over time.

Pupils arrive at school smart, cheerful and eager to learn: they put into practice the school's motto, 'If you can, you must'. Some of the pupils enjoy school so much that they express a desire to have more lessons and a longer school day. Parents are hugely appreciative of the school's work. Comments such as 'amazing leaders', 'dedicated team' and 'my child loves going to school' typify their views.

Your senior staff support you well. Their positive impact on the quality of teaching, assessment and the curriculum demonstrate their capacity to bring about further improvements. All staff who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire said that they are proud to work at the school.

The governing body provides effective challenge, and governors are tenacious in checking on the effectiveness of actions taken to improve the school. For example, they make sure that pupils receive the right support that they need when they need it.

Children make a good start in the Reception Year. Your careful targeting of resources to support individual children's speech and language needs enables them to catch up quickly. Overall, children achieve levels of development above those seen nationally by the end of the Reception Year. Pupils continue to extend their knowledge, skills and understanding to attain standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2 that are similarly strong. Current work in books shows that progress slows in writing for some pupils in Year 3 in particular.

The curriculum ensures that the school's core values of 'care, aspiration, respect and excellence' are an embedded part of school life. Politeness, respect and courtesy typify pupils' daily actions towards each other and adults. Pupils' behaviour and positive attitudes to learning in and around the school are exemplary.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to extend pupils' acquisition of literacy, numeracy and science skills, and to enhance their awareness of different cultural groups in the United Kingdom and beyond. The school has improved all these aspects well. The changes made to the curriculum enable pupils to regularly practise and apply their literacy, numeracy and scientific skills with a greater level of independence through their topic work. Similarly, carefully thought-out plans to include global links are supporting pupils' knowledge and understanding of different cultures and beliefs.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff at the school provide pupils with high-quality care. Pupils say that they feel safe and secure; parents agree with this. Safeguarding measures are rigorous and understood by all. Governors are diligent in ensuring that all staff are appropriately checked before appointment and that staff receive the training they need. Training on the government's 'Prevent' duty ensures that all staff and governors are well informed and know how to protect pupils from the risk of exposure to extremist views. Records show that where concerns are expressed, referral practices are swift and efficient. Records are well organised and demonstrate a deep commitment to acting sensitively but quickly, engaging external support and advice where required.

Inspection findings

- The school has taken decisive action to build on pupils' generally good writing by extending their skills across the curriculum. A consistency of approach is evident throughout the school, aligned to the clear guidance provided for teachers by senior leaders. The range of work in pupils' books and displays across the school demonstrate that pupils are applying their literacy skills well in other subjects. For example, when explaining the adventures that the '10 rubber ducks' might have had when floating around in the ocean, children in Reception wrote imaginative sentences as well as carefully reporting their findings from measuring and investigating materials that would float and sink.

- Staff successfully develop pupils' understanding of people from different backgrounds, beliefs and cultures. Pupils show a high level of respect for each other regardless of their background. Any incidents such as name-calling, however slight the concern, are followed up quickly. Teachers are diligent in promoting modern British values. Pupils' good understanding of democracy and the rule of law is characterised by the way they run the school council. Elected pupils manage budgets and share the impact of the council's work in weekly assemblies. Pupils welcome the many leadership roles available to them and the ability to contribute to the school's development.
- The strong focus on improving the quality and use of assessment across the school has been effective. Teachers' approach to marking and feedback is contributing to pupils' accelerating rates of progress in most year groups. Middle leaders work within, and across, a local group of schools to moderate pupils' work. As a result, teachers' very good understanding of age-related expectations is enabling them to make very secure assessments. Teachers' careful use of success criteria is effective in helping pupils to understand what they need to do to achieve well. Pupils act on teachers' feedback and say that teachers help them to improve.
- Children in the early years and pupils in Year 1 are making rapid progress. Attainment in these year groups is above the national average and improving. For example, pupils achieving the expected standard in phonics (letters and the sounds they make) are above the national average. Pupils' overall attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is continuing to rise due to leaders' diligent monitoring of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Improvements in teaching have ensured that all pupils, including the most able pupils, make good progress.
- Disadvantaged pupils are making good progress as a consequence of the school's actions. The whole-school drive to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has led to improved standards. Careful tracking and monitoring of each pupil's progress across academic, social and emotional aspects of learning by the leader responsible are enabling pupils to receive the support they need. The school has been effective in closing the gap between these pupils and other pupils nationally. An attainment gap still exists between disadvantaged pupils in the school and their classmates. However, assessment information shows that many disadvantaged pupils are now making more rapid progress because of the extra help they receive, so that this gap is closing.
- Pupils' progress is not consistently rapid across the different skills they acquire. For example, pupils' writing is mostly of a high quality but handwriting skills are less developed than other aspects. Key words are sometimes not spelled correctly, particularly in Year 3.
- Despite the school's efforts, pupils' attendance remains slightly below the national average. There is a wider gap for disadvantaged pupils, which undermines the school's efforts to raise their achievement. The school has worked hard to improve pupils' attendance. Records are detailed and meticulously maintained. You have raised the profile of the importance of attendance in newsletters, through 'attendance clinics' with families, and through individual and class rewards. A more recent initiative, inviting

parents and pupils to attend the breakfast club, is showing promising signs of improvement, but it is too soon to see a significant impact. You also engage the support of a local authority school attendance officer in tackling persistent absenteeism. You and your governing body expressed disappointment that this support is slow to arrive.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- attendance across the school improves to at least national averages and that the attendance for disadvantaged pupils improves urgently
- pupils make consistently good progress across the school as the result of teachers' shared high expectations of standards of handwriting, and also of spelling, grammar and punctuation in Year 3.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracy Hannon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, other leaders, members of the governing body and a group of pupils. I spoke with pupils during lessons and scrutinised the quality of their work in books. I also considered wide-ranging documentary evidence relating to safeguarding, the quality of teaching, assessment and use of the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils entitled to free school meals and those looked after by the local authority). I also scrutinised the school's analysis of its attendance records. I took account of 19 responses to the staff questionnaire, four responses to the pupils' questionnaire and 28 parental responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.