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Mrs Sarah Annable
Head of Academy
Simpson's Lane Academy
Sycamore Avenue
Knottingley
West Yorkshire
WF11 0PJ

Dear Mrs Annable

Short inspection of Simpson's Lane Academy

Following my visit to the school on 16 March 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 became an academy in September 2012.

This school continues to be good.

You, and your leadership team, have maintained the good quality of education in the school. You have developed a caring and nurturing environment and know your school community extremely well. This has led you to take appropriate and effective actions to help pupils continue to make good progress, often from very low starting points.

Despite many children starting the school well below where they should be for their age, there is a no-excuse culture and leaders do not see these challenges as barriers to a pupil's success. Tremendous efforts are made to successfully engage parents and help them understand how well their children are attending and achieving. Improving outcomes over time demonstrate the success of your approach.

Leaders across the school carefully and regularly check on how well pupils are achieving. Subject leaders have a detailed grasp of why teaching is effective and how it can be made even better. You, and other leaders, are highly ambitious and determined to see pupils achieve their best, and you have rightly identified that there are instances in a few lessons where work could be even more challenging for some most-able pupils.

You provide governors with clear and helpful updates on the progress pupils are making. This enables governors to confidently ask challenging and appropriate questions which focus on the impact actions are having on pupils' progress. Governors also benefit from receiving helpful reports and updates from other leaders including vice-principals and subject leaders. Some governors are able to visit the school during the day and see the progress being made for themselves. Consequently, they rightly identify the vibrancy and desire all staff show in wanting pupils to achieve their very best.

The executive principal visits the school regularly and provides effective support and mentoring for you as the head of academy. These visits have helped develop your confidence and build capacity within the school to improve further. They have confirmed that you and your senior leaders are accurate in your judgements about how well the school is doing. The executive principal has also helped you focus on a clear and manageable number of priorities for the year ahead.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, and your leadership team, have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and records are detailed and of high quality. All staff within the school receive regular and effective safeguarding training. This is helping them effectively spot any potential concerns they may have about a pupil's safety. Recent training has also helped increase staff confidence in identifying any early signs of extremism.

Significant work has been done to improve pupils' attendance and reduce persistent absence. You and your staff work closely and effectively with parents to highlight the vital importance of regularly attending school and the impact this has on their child's learning and progress. Both parents and pupils confirm that this work is having a positive effect on improving attendance. For example, 'traffic light' displays are in classrooms showing pupils whether their attendance is good or should be better. Through the use of a range of rewards, trips and celebrations for good attendance, persistent absence is falling and attendance is improving. One pupil told me that, at the start of the year, he was 'shocked' to see that his attendance was not good and that school actions have helped him attend regularly now. You rightly recognise the need to further improve the attendance of some disadvantaged pupils.

Pupils feel safe and are well looked after. Teachers consistently use the school's behaviour policy to deal with any minor disruptions, and the learning mentor provides effective extra support for those pupils who need help managing their behaviour. Child protection files show that school leaders work well with other agencies and professionals. School staff regularly attend case review meetings and provide updates on the progress vulnerable pupils are making. The quality of the child protection plans needs further work. These plans would benefit from having clearer and more measurable targets so that it is easier to regularly hold the school and other agencies and professionals to account for the difference they are making in improving vulnerable pupils' outcomes.

Inspection findings

- As a result of strong leadership and management, teaching continues to improve. Teachers demonstrate high expectations and usually set challenging work for their pupils. Additional adults work well in and out of lessons, successfully helping pupils make faster progress.
- Leaders and managers in the Nursery and Reception are helping children make more rapid progress despite joining Nursery with often very low starting points. A wide range of additional support is helping more children improve their ability to read, write and use numbers. Leaders recognise the need to further enhance indoor and outdoor provision so that there are even more opportunities for children to practise and develop these skills.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive. Staff model good behaviour. As a result, pupils are polite and welcoming. They are inquisitive, say, 'Good morning' and open doors to visitors. In class, they show good attitudes to learning, are attentive, and sit up straight and listen when the teacher is talking.
- Parents told me that leaders and managers are always approachable and keen to listen to any concerns they have. Parents have confidence in you and your staff in making sure that any issues are dealt with quickly and effectively. One parent best summed this up by saying, 'My children love going to school and the teaching and staff are fantastic.'
- The school's development plans focus on the right priorities. These plans would be an even better tool for school improvement if they made it clearer exactly what improvements were intended, when they would happen and the role governors will play in checking their impact.
- The curriculum provides pupils with many opportunities to develop their understanding of the wider world and different cultures and faiths. Assemblies also complement this work well and pupils said how they enjoyed learning about things such as the Chinese New Year and Sikhism. Topic books show that teachers sometimes miss opportunities to develop and deepen pupils' writing skills in different contexts including history, geography and religious education (RE).

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- attendance of disadvantaged pupils continues to improve
- there are more opportunities in Reception for children to develop their reading, writing and number skills

- all teachers deliver lessons that are suitably challenging for all pupils, especially the most-able, and provide more opportunities to develop pupils' writing in history, geography and RE.
- school plans, including child protection plans, are further refined so that there are clear and measurable outcomes for what will be improved and by when.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the education advisory board (EAB), the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for the City of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Phil Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you, the regional director for the School Partnership Trust Academies, the executive principal, your vice-principals, four subject leaders and the special educational needs coordinator. I also met with a group of pupils, members of the EAB and a group of parents. Together with your vice -principals, we visited classrooms to observe teaching and look at pupils' work. We also looked in depth at the work and progress of pupils over time. Consideration was given to five responses from the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. I evaluated recent information in relation to pupils' progress throughout the school, the school's self-evaluation document, the school's development plan and your arrangements for checking the performance of teachers. I also reviewed documentation and records about how you keep pupils safe.