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Mrs Jessica Humphrey
Executive headteacher
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Dear Mrs Humphrey

Short inspection of Curledge Street Academy

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 2018, 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 May 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You work diligently and effectively with a committed team of leaders who share your ambition for the pupils. Since your appointment in 2010, you have successfully set about raising expectations so that pupils make good progress and are well prepared for the next stage of their learning when they leave Curledge Street. You have been particularly effective in identifying and developing leadership talent. This is coming to the fore where highly skilled leaders are working effectively with other staff to secure improvements in pupils' social, emotional and academic outcomes. You and other leaders have high aspirations for the pupils and do not accept any excuses. As a result, pupils make strong progress, often from low starting points.

You ensure that teaching, learning and assessment are of a high quality by carefully evaluating how well your strategies and initiatives are working. You also hold meetings with teachers to ensure that pupils are in the right groups or receiving suitable interventions to enable them to succeed. As a result, pupils are motivated and well supported to make good progress. You act swiftly when you identify any weaknesses in teaching. These are remedied speedily through focused support and tailored professional development. Pupils enjoy coming to school and feel that they are well taught. Similarly, most parents are supportive of the school and views commonly expressed through Ofsted's survey (Parent View) include, 'My child is thriving at this school' and 'Keep it up Curledge Street. You're doing a great job!'

Since the previous inspection, you have worked well to tackle the areas identified for development. Most significantly, to continue to raise achievement, you have raised staff and pupils' expectations. For example, in 2017 pupils' progress in key stage 2 writing was in the top 25% of schools, having been significantly below the national average previously. In addition, pupils' basic skills are being developed well across a wide range of subjects. This is reflected in measures of key stage 2 progress, which, for 2017, placed the school in the top 15% and 5% for reading and mathematics respectively.

However, we agreed that there are still some areas for you and other leaders to continue tackling. These include developing and strengthening pupils' handwriting skills so as to improve the quality of writing further. In addition, although pupils have made good progress towards catching up in their phonics skills and knowledge by the end of Year 2, there are still some pupils who are not meeting the standard expected of them in the Year 1 phonics screening check. This slows the progress for these pupils in using and applying their phonic knowledge to reach the higher standards in reading and writing.

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that pupils are kept safe through a strong culture for safeguarding which looks after pupils' emotional, physical and mental well-being. As a member of staff told me, 'The safety of the child is paramount.' This is an ethos and belief shared by all. You ensure that all safeguarding requirements are robust and effective, including vetting staff before you employ them and staff training. As a result, staff know what to do to keep pupils safe and how to raise any concerns quickly. Staff are tenacious in holding other professional agencies to account so that vulnerable pupils receive timely support and care when needed.

Pupils say they feel safe and trust staff. They are happy and feel well supported in school. You work closely with a designated pastoral support team that, together with other staff, meets the needs of the pupils fully to help them succeed.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry evaluated how quickly children catch up with their peers in early language and literacy skills, including the speed of development of their knowledge of letters and sounds required to read and write well. This is because there are many children who start in the early years with skills and development that are low. In particular, they find communication and language difficult, which acts as a barrier to developing their speaking and listening skills as well as their reading and writing. You and other leaders recognise this and have taken effective action to intervene. For example, you have set up high-quality early years provision to ensure that children work together and interact meaningfully with staff, who model language well. As a result, children rapidly gain the confidence and skills to share ideas, express themselves and communicate freely. Staff probe children's understanding and use a range of resources to generate interest and enthusiasm. This includes sharing and finding enjoyment in the humour and curiosity of books.

- Leaders have worked effectively to ensure a consistent and seamless transition to the teaching of phonics from the early years into key stage 1. Staff expectations are high. The school's daily systematic approach to the teaching of phonics works well in teaching pupils to use letters and sounds for spelling, reading and writing. Staff teach phonics with clear expectations and a sense of urgency. Leaders are developing an approach to ensure that children in the early years are taught letters and sounds, including through targeted group work and interventions. These are now in place, including in the Nursery, where children are taught to recognise and use letters and sounds such as 'S-A-T' confidently.
- Staff encourage children in the early years, including three- and four-year-olds, to play with letters, sounds and words. They introduce them to books and texts which are models for their own early reading and writing experiences. For example, children in the Nursery have been making their own books based on 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt'. These enable the children to understand how to build words from letters and use these in order to make sense. Children enjoy these activities and are developing their command of the spoken and written word through different forms and mediums.
- We agreed that this approach needs to be sustained and developed to support children in reaching age-appropriate standards in the Year 1 phonics screening check. There is still a difference between the school's results and those of other schools nationally. In missing this milestone, pupils find themselves continuing to 'catch up', rather than being in the more beneficial position of working towards the highest standards.
- My second key line of enquiry explored how well all pupils are making progress in reading in key stage 2. Despite strong overall outcomes in 2017, the progress of some pupils, in particular girls, was much lower than that of other pupils. The achievement of girls in reading was starkly lower than that of others. You and your leaders had already identified this and the reasons for it. You have addressed this fully and there is now no continuing difference in outcomes between girls and boys. You have worked successfully with identified staff to improve tracking, checking and planning of different groups and pupils.
- Effective and timely interventions help pupils to read well and to apply what they have learned in their own written work. For example, Year 6 girls showed me where they have used powerful language such as 'emotive', 'rhetorical' and 'exaggerated' in their own work to add depth and meaning.
- However, in reviewing pupils' work in their books, we agreed that the quality and presentation of pupils' handwriting is not consistently good. Pupils are not always challenged or supported to write neatly, legibly and fluently. This holds some back, especially from meeting the highest standards. At those times when handwriting is poor, pupils are not writing with the same length, style and composition to reach the standards of which they are capable.
- My third key line of enquiry evaluated the reasons behind the school's successful mathematics outcomes, including the strong rates of progress and the high proportion of pupils meeting the highest standards in 2017 tests. You and other leaders have used professional development and training effectively to share good practice. For example, training in 'stretching the most able' and action

research in the classroom (where teachers have tested their own ideas) have been effective in raising the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Teachers collaborate and share their expertise well to raise the achievement of pupils.

- Leaders present challenges and target priority areas well to improve teaching and learning in mathematics. For example, the current drive to improve pupils' mathematical thinking and reasoning is heavily reflected in pupils' work. Staff encourage pupils to explore and justify their answers fully. As a result, pupils are increasingly able to hypothesise, predict and check their mathematical understanding and use their knowledge to solve complex problems.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils continue to make accelerated progress to meet the standards expected in the Year 1 phonics screening check
- pupils' handwriting is improved to enable them to write fluently and compose highest-quality writing across the curriculum.

I am copying this letter to the chief executive officer, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Torbay. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stewart Gale
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

We agreed the timetable and activities for the inspection. I worked extensively with you and your team, including sampling a range of pupils' work and talking with pupils through inspection activities. I scrutinised safeguarding records and we discussed a wide range of related matters, including staff recruitment, training and vetting arrangements. I spoke to pupils and staff about their views of safeguarding. I evaluated evidence that shows how you work with other agencies to keep children safe. I worked extensively across the various age ranges in the school, including in the early years. I met with representatives of the trust board and reviewed school documents, including the school's self-evaluation summary and records of governors' visits. I took full account of the 57 responses on Parent View as well as the free-texts received through the inspection. I read additional information provided by parents who contacted Ofsted directly.