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Mrs Anne Ingle
Headteacher
Bilsthorpe Flying High Academy
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Dear Mrs Ingle

Short inspection of Bilsthorpe Flying High Academy

Following my visit to the school on 27 September 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school joined the Flying High Trust in October 2015 and, since your appointment in May 2017, together you have effectively led improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and behaviour across the school. As a result, the rate of pupils' progress has increased, particularly in key stage 1. Leaders work effectively as a cohesive team. The trust, members of the governing body, staff, and pupils value your leadership and commitment to improving the school. You have been tenacious in your desire to connect with parents and families. The majority of parents and carers appreciate the nurturing environment of the school and how it has become a hub of the community.

Leaders have worked hard to raise the aspirations of pupils and families. Throughout the school, pupils demonstrate their strong desire to learn. A careers week was held, in which local professionals came into school to discuss their careers and the numerous possibilities open to pupils. They supported pupils in recognising the skills needed in order to be successful in the world of work.

Pupils are inquisitive and enjoy talking to visitors and showing them their work, of which they are proud. Children in the early years are already demonstrating sustained concentration in their activities and were excited to discuss the theme of their learning, 'The Little Red Hen'. Throughout the school, pupils were engrossed in their learning and described their lessons as 'fun'. In Year 5, pupils were keen to discuss a fictional letter they had recently received from Mars and how they had responded.

Leaders have thought carefully about pupils' barriers to learning and have created a curriculum to tackle these head on. A purposeful and relevant curriculum, which is rich with experiences, allows pupils to make strong progress from their starting points. For example, Year 6 pupils were re-enacting life in the trenches during the Second World War to support their writing. Through this experience, they were better able to understand the emotions behind the words in their writing. Pupils enjoy coming to school and attend regularly because they say teachers make learning fun. One parent said, 'The new headteacher has brought a new excitement for my children and they can't wait to see what surprises the teaching staff will come up with next.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and the governing body have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Regular training for staff and support for families, on such issues as domestic violence, create a culture of care that is evident throughout the school. Records are detailed and secure. Leaders and other staff liaise well with a wide variety of external agencies and actively seek help for families. Parents commented on the open and friendly nature of the school and said that they find you and your staff to be approachable and supportive of their children's needs. One parent said, 'The staff can never do enough for the children and parents and are always happy to help when you need to have a chat.'

Pupils were keen to tell me how safe they feel in school. They used words such as 'amazing', 'brilliant' and 'caring' to describe their school. Pupils understand what bullying is and say that rare instances are quickly and effectively dealt with.

Inspection findings

- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. They make good progress from their starting points and have developed positive attitudes to their learning.
- In 2016 and 2017, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in key stage 1 was below the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. Too few pupils reached the higher standard in all three subjects. Leaders rightly identified pupils' progress across key stage 1 as an area to improve. Focused support, accurate and regular monitoring and improvements in teaching have had a considerable impact on pupils' progress and attainment. School information and evidence from lessons and pupils' work indicate that standards rose considerably last year. This is particularly the case in reading and mathematics. Although improvements have been made across the school, the proportion of pupils who achieve the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics has not improved as rapidly.
- Children enter the early years with skills and knowledge that are below those typical for their age, particularly in the area of language and communication. From 2014 to 2017, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of their time in the early years was below the national average. Leaders addressed this and have improved the provision for children by creating a learning environment which is now based on the children's needs. Adults use every opportunity to develop

the children's speech, language and communication skills so that they are now receiving a high-quality start in the early years. The school opened a pre-school in 2014 which has had a considerable impact on the progress children make across the early years provision. The vast majority who attend the pre-school make rapid progress from their starting points and achieve a good level of development by the time they enter key stage 1.

- Leaders have successfully addressed the need to improve the performance of pupils in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1. A new phonics programme has been introduced which, with the support of a specialist leader of education provided by The Flying High Trust, is now followed consistently across the school. This has led to an increase in standards. Work in pupils' books shows that they use their phonic knowledge effectively to support their writing.
- Historically, more pupils have achieved the expected standards in mathematics than in reading or writing. Leaders have addressed this imbalance and put measures in place to even this out. As children typically enter school with weak language and communication skills, leaders have created a language-rich learning environment throughout the school. Teachers actively encourage pupils to develop their vocabulary and to think deeply about the words used by others. This was observed in lessons throughout the school and was evident in pupils' work. School information shows that there has been a significant positive impact of this on the rate of pupils' progress, particularly in key stage 1.
- The Flying High Trust has provided effective support to the school. The director for school improvement from the trust has worked closely with you and senior leaders, ensuring that you have the capacity to continue to make further improvements. Middle leadership, however, is at an early stage of development and this has been identified as an area to strengthen within the school. Plans for improvement are not currently precise enough with clear targets and accurate timescales to hold both leaders and teachers to account for the impact of their work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of middle leadership is strengthened
- plans for improvement are more precise so that the most important next steps are identified, with clear milestones for success so that leaders and teachers can be held fully accountable for the impact of their actions
- challenge for the most able is effective so as to increase the proportion of pupils who achieve greater depth at key stage 1 and the higher standard at key stage 2.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive officer of The Flying High Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Nottinghamshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Heidi Malliff
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and shared my key lines of inquiry. I also met with the chief executive, the deputy chief executive and the director of quality assurance and school improvement from The Flying High Trust. I also met with four members of the governing body, three middle leaders and a number of parents at the start of the school day. I considered the responses of parents to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View. We visited most classes in the school as well as your pre-school, spending a short time in each, and looked at a sample of pupils' work. I viewed a range of documents including an evaluation of school performance and plans for further improvement, case studies and your information regarding pupil progress across the school.