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Dear Mrs Alexander

Short inspection of Meryfield Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 July 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 November 2011.

This school continues to be good.

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

Meryfield Primary School is a school that promotes a love of learning. You provide strong and purposeful leadership. You are diligent in your efforts to improve the school and refuse to be complacent. You are resolute in your vision that your school will eventually provide an outstanding education for the children in your care. Pupils, parents, staff and governors share your passion, commitment and dedication to continue to improve the school. Consequently, pupils enjoy coming to school, learn well and their behaviour is exemplary.

In June 2016, leaders' success in creating an inclusive school was recognised when you were awarded the Inclusion Quality Mark. The report states that 'families with differences in culture, beliefs and faiths are welcomed, pupils with a range of learning needs and differences are supported so that they can move towards achieving as individuals'. This was further verified by the inspection evidence.

One example of this is your work with children who arrive at the school with little or no English. These pupils are welcomed by their classmates, undertake a thorough induction process to determine their starting points, and are very well supported. As a result, these pupils make good progress and evidence in their books shows that they rapidly gain the confidence to write using increasingly complex sentences and talk self-assuredly about their work.

Parents value the work of you and your staff. An overwhelming majority of those who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online parental questionnaire, said that they would recommend the school to others. Additionally, parent responses through the Ofsted free text system were full of descriptions of the school as 'amazing', 'fantastic' and 'wonderful'. Parents reported that you and the staff 'work in a spirit of partnership with parents' and that Meryfield has a 'strong, caring and supportive ethos'.

Staff morale is also very high. Their responses to the staff questionnaire report that they are proud to work in the school and value the way in which leaders support and care for their well-being. This attitude was confirmed in my interactions with members of staff.

You and your leaders continually review your work and identify areas where further improvements can be made. Your detailed development plans set out your priorities with agreed timescales. This approach has ensured that standards have continued to rise. You and your leaders check pupils' academic and personal progress each term. You know in detail how much progress pupils make from their starting points. Together with other leaders, you identify pupils at risk of falling behind or those whose progress has slowed. Timely and appropriate support ensures that any barriers to their learning are addressed and they catch up with their classmates. As a result, at every stage of transition, pupils are very well prepared for the next steps in their education.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to ensure that all leaders took sufficient opportunities to check on the attainment and progress of all groups. You have acted on this and have rigorous systems to ensure that pupils are achieving well. Leaders observe teaching and learning regularly, and meet frequently with teachers to discuss pupils' progress. They look at the work in pupils' books and, where appropriate, put targeted support in place for those who are falling behind. As a result of these actions, all teachers are very clear about their role in improving pupils' achievement and are scrupulously held to account to do so.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, staff and governors have established a clear culture of safeguarding in the school. The single central record of checks on the backgrounds of staff and their suitability to work with children is well maintained and meets the relevant requirements. The safeguarding team within the school have an insightful understanding of how to keep children safe and ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Your team maintains high-quality, detailed records. Similarly, the work you have done with individual child protection cases is well evidenced and recorded. Consequently, all pupils' safety and well-being are thoroughly considered. Parents are clear that their children are well looked after and are safe at the school. Moreover, pupils say that they feel safe and they know who to turn to if they have

any concerns. Pupils' understanding of how to keep safe and avoid risks is developed well through the curriculum. For example, in Year 1 pupils learn about e-safety through stories, such as 'The adventures of Smartie the penguin'. Pupils said that teachers used fun ways to teach them about risks and that this helped pupils to understand how to keep safe online and within the community.

Inspection findings

- Pupils develop positive attitudes towards learning. This is due to the calm, nurturing, 'whole-child' approach that the school adopts towards ensuring that their needs are fully met. Pupils develop a self-assurance and resilience in their time at Meryfield Primary School. For example, during the inspection pupils eagerly shared their choreography of a modern and contemporary dance they had been rehearsing; a music teacher encouraged pupils to express themselves creatively through their drumming, and all pupils sang beautifully during their whole-school singing assembly. As a result of these opportunities, pupils are confident and able to celebrate their talents and achievements.
- The proportion of children in the early years who achieve a good level of development is at the national average and continues to rise. The school's assessments of children's skills on entry to the Nursery and the early years show that many are working at levels below those typical for children of their age. From their starting points, children make good progress by the time that they finish Reception.
- The number of pupils who passed the Year 1 phonics screening check has improved and is consistently above the national standard. This is due to the good teaching that pupils receive. It is also because reading is central to the life of the school; everywhere in the school are displays emphasising that regular reading is the passport to success in later life. Pupils read regularly at school. However, despite the best efforts of your staff, some pupils do not do this enough in their own time. You and your team continue to encourage more regular reading at home.
- By the end of key stage 2, pupils meet the national standards in reading, writing and mathematics. However, you astutely identified that the proportions of pupils exceeding national standards needed to increase to better reflect the capabilities of your most-able pupils. You and other senior leaders are actively attending to this through more focused initiatives such as your pupil progress meetings. Consequently, current information shows that more of your most-able pupils are making more rapid progress and achieving higher standards.
- The guidance that teachers give to pupils is both encouraging and developmental. The influence of this on improving spelling, punctuation and grammar is clear to see. However, the same level of response is not as evident in key stage 2 mathematics books. Pupils do not always know their next steps and so, do not make as much progress as they could in mathematics.

- Pupils' achievement in writing is improving rapidly, especially at key stage 2. Here, pupils are being given extensive opportunities to rehearse and use their English skills in all areas of the curriculum. For example, the pupils' use of discursive writing in their history lessons when debating the British government's policy of evacuation during the second world war was of a particularly high quality. Although key stage 1 pupils are also showing that they can use their writing skills well, you rightly acknowledge that the younger pupils need more opportunities to apply their writing skills in subjects other than English at an earlier age.
- All leaders are supported effectively in their roles as curriculum leaders. Staff talk positively about the mentoring, coaching and professional development opportunities they receive. The leadership of many subject areas is being developed well. This is particularly the case in mathematics, English, science and computing. Evidence in books and on display shows that pupils make good progress in these subject areas.
- You use the pupil premium funding well to provide additional support for disadvantaged pupils. One example is the way in which specialised teaching assistants use specific support programmes to help disadvantaged pupils catch up with their classmates. As a result, the gap between disadvantaged pupils' achievement and that of others is closing rapidly in all year groups for reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points. Pupils' academic and personal needs are addressed in equal measure. This means that any challenges they face in their learning do not get in the way of them making good progress.
- Work to challenge the most able pupils is ensuring that an increasing proportion of them are achieving better than expected for pupils of their age. This is because teachers know their pupils well and adapt planning skilfully, considering their varying starting points and setting them work that challenges them. For example, in a Year 4 mathematics lesson, pupils were interpreting line graphs. The most able group of pupils who could do this well were using this skill to pose questions to their classmates. Consequently, this meant that pupils displayed a deeper understanding of data analysis and interpretation.
- Since the previous inspection, you have continued to review and improve the curriculum to meet the needs of your pupils. For example, teachers previously identified that in the early years the achievement of boys was not as good as that of girls. Leaders actively research and teach topics linked to pupils' personal interests, which engage pupils – particularly boys in the early years. This has led to a rapid increase in boys' achievement in the early years.
- Pupils' work and observations during the inspection demonstrate that science teaching is good. This is because teachers provide a range of regular first-hand experiences, often using the school grounds, to investigate and develop their scientific understanding.

- You and your staff have worked hard to ensure that the large number of pupils that join you midway through the year are achieving well. These pupils are quickly assessed when they first join so that you know accurately what they can and cannot do. You then ensure that support is put in place to help them to catch up with their classmates. Examples seen on inspection show that these pupils are making good progress from various starting points but their peers who joined at the beginning of the year still make more rapid progress. You continue to develop more one-to-one opportunities to improve the outcomes for these pupils.
- Pupils enjoy taking on different responsibilities within the school. For example, older pupils help to run the school library and 'buddy groups' give all year groups the chance to work together and support each other's learning. The 'green team' take their role very seriously to ensure that the school recycles resources, and they regularly promote energy-saving by reminding everyone that lights are to be switched off when not required. Pupils also talk enthusiastically about their school council roles. They feel proud that their ideas are taken on board by leaders and used to make a difference. For example, the school council are in the process of buying a 'buddy stop' so that any pupil who does not have someone to play with at break or lunchtime can use this and someone will make sure that they are not on their own.
- You have a swift and rigorous response to any absence and you challenge parents appropriately about any requested long-term absence for whatever reason. As a result, attendance is constantly improving and is currently in line with national figures.
- Governors are committed to the school and ambitious for its continued success. They know the school well because they visit regularly to obtain their own first-hand evidence to verify the information they are given. Governors explicitly monitor pupils' progress and have a good understanding of the complex profile of those attending the school. Consequently, the provision for all pupils, including the disadvantaged and the most vulnerable, is closely scrutinised so that they achieve well. While governors are proactive in gathering the views of pupils and staff to improve their own effectiveness, they are not as thorough in evaluating the views of parents.
- The school's website meets the current statutory requirements.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils in key stage 1 are able to practise and further develop their writing skills in subjects other than English
- the guidance that pupils receive in mathematics at key stage 2 enables them to make more rapid progress from their starting points
- they develop more regular and effective methods of gathering the views of parents and carers to inform their work.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracy Fielding
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, school leaders, the chair of the governing body and other governors. I discussed the work of the school with you and we visited classes together. I spoke with pupils during lessons and met with pupils from the school council. I scrutinised the quality of the work in English, mathematics, science and assessment books. I met with a local authority representative to provide additional information. I took account of 14 responses to the staff questionnaire and 48 parental responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also noted the 47 responses to the Parent View free text service. I looked at a wide range of evidence including leaders' self-evaluation, the school development plan, safeguarding records, attendance information, teaching records and pupils' assessment information. I checked the statutory requirements of the school's website.