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Ms Nicola Dowling
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Dear Ms Dowling

Short inspection of Highfield Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 December 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 January 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 has continued to improve to a high standard because of your strong, collaborative leadership and passion for providing pupils with memorable educational experiences. You, and all staff, have created a strong sense of care and nurture for the whole school community. All staff who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire are proud to be part of Highfield and all agree that the school is well led and that they are treated fairly and with respect. You and your deputy have a shared commitment and enthusiasm to improve the school. The high expectations you have set ensure that there is a strong focus on achieving the very best for your pupils. Pupils, parents and staff have a deep sense of being part of a school that feels like a 'family' which is excited by learning.

Most parents who spoke to me, or responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, are very positive about the school and would recommend it to others. A number of parents particularly appreciate that you and your staff are very welcoming. Many commented on how you are regularly in the playground to greet them and pupils in the morning. Comments from parents such as 'It's a special place I'm proud to be part of', 'amazing school' and 'many ways parents are encouraged to get involved' are typical. It is clear from my short time with you that this is a happy, purposeful school.

In 2016, a high proportion of children reached a good level of development at the end of Reception and the percentage of pupils that met the expected standard in the national phonics screening check was above that of pupils of a similar age nationally. Pupils' attainment and progress at the end of key stage 1 have improved over the last few years, at all levels, with pupils achieving comparably with or above pupils of a similar age nationally. There was a dip in attainment in 2016, but you have been quick to identify the reasons for this. You have put actions in place to ensure that pupils are now back on track to achieve well in 2017 and in future years.

At the end of key stage 2, pupils achieved well above pupils of a similar age at the expected standard in writing, mathematics and grammar, punctuation and spelling. However, you are well aware that pupils achieved less well in reading and are mindful that there are more pupils with the potential to achieve at higher standards. The dynamic plans you have put in place are already leading to improvement in these areas and pupils are now on track to achieve higher standards in reading and other subjects.

Those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are very well supported by staff and they make good progress throughout the school. Disadvantaged pupils are similarly well supported and the vast majority make the progress of which they are capable.

At the previous inspection, inspectors identified a need to raise achievement in speaking, reading and writing. This was by ensuring greater depth of challenge was given to pupils in writing tasks and that this work was consistently marked. Inspectors asked that pupils were offered more chances to improve their speaking skills and to respond to probing questions, and that they were provided with more opportunities to read. Finally, they asked that pupils were offered more occasions to practise their learning by working independently and in groups.

Leaders have addressed all these aspects effectively and have ensured that the following improvements have taken place:

- Writing has a very high profile in school; the quality of resources offered to pupils to stimulate them in writing tasks is excellent, as are the skills taught to develop writing at all ages. As a result, the majority of pupils are producing writing that is rich, creative and regularly leads to imaginative, extended pieces of work. This is supported by consistent marking in accordance with the school's policy.
- Speaking skills are a constant priority for the school because a number of children start with relatively weak communication skills. The focused work on developing skills and encouraging confidence to speak is very successful. Young children soon talk to adults in sentences and older pupils have become confident and articulate at explaining their learning and expressing their views. Teachers ask good questions and elicit responses that indicate children's understanding and deeper thinking.
- Reading is a similarly high priority in school and, as a result, pupils are given many opportunities to read for themselves, to others and as a class group. Many

pupils read well and those who struggle have a good range of strategies to help them. The most able readers enjoy reading and are offered a good range of interesting books to enthuse them.

- Pupils work in many different ways that encourage them to support each other, cooperate and learn together.

Safeguarding is effective.

There are extremely well-maintained systems in place in all areas of safeguarding, and staff understand them. Safeguarding arrangements are regularly reviewed to meet statutory requirements. Frequent and appropriate training for staff and governors is undertaken and up to date, including in relation to the 'Prevent' duty. You and your team are very diligent in regard to your responsibilities to ensure that pupils are kept safe and their welfare needs are met. Your vigilance around the care and support of vulnerable pupils is of a high standard. Leaders have effective relationships with other agencies and are persistent in situations where vulnerable pupils need extra support or advocacy.

Pupils were unanimous in saying that they feel very safe and well cared for in school. They are confident that adults will help them if needed. Pupils develop effective personal skills within a nurturing environment. Pupils talk with knowledge about the ways they can stay safe in a range of situations, including when they are online. The vast majority of parents feel that you and the staff keep their children safe and well looked after. As a result, pupils are very happy and keen to come to school.

Inspection findings

- Your school's self-evaluation and school development plans are of a high standard. They are accurate, reflective and used effectively to ensure that everyone in school is clear about the direction in which they are heading. You and your leadership team show good capacity for improving the school further.
- Your drive for improvement has been focused effectively on establishing high expectations and consistency in the quality of teaching and learning. You know each teacher's strengths and areas for development very well. Staff have benefited from a range of training. I agree with you that it would be useful for you and your team to continue to look at outstanding practice in teaching and learning elsewhere. This will support your plans for the next stage of your school's improvement journey.
- Governance is strong. Governors play an informed role in evaluating the school's effectiveness. Governors have used their own experiences well to play an active role in the life of the school. I was particularly impressed with the way they monitor their areas of responsibility and actively use the assessment information available to them to ask pertinent questions. They share your passion for providing the best for pupils. They are very supportive but are also able to challenge very effectively, where needed.

- The information you gather about pupils' progress is appropriate. You have a clear and successful system that is used effectively by leaders, teachers and governors. This information clearly identifies which pupils or groups are making progress and which need some additional support or challenge. It has also been effective in encouraging teachers to focus on the skills and attributes that pupils have and need to gain.
- Your teaching and learning team are keen to make an important contribution to driving further improvements. Members talk with enthusiasm and knowledge about their areas of responsibility, particularly when these involve developing aspects of the curriculum in more depth and making it even more lively and interesting for pupils.
- You have correctly identified the need to improve further the achievement of pupils at the end of key stage 2 in reading and to reach higher standards in all subjects. To this end, you have taken decisive action, including refining your English and mathematics curriculum to extend and challenge pupils further. You have established a strategic reading team to monitor very closely pupils' progress in reading. You have introduced 'non-negotiables' which insist on, for example, pupils having access to a stimulating range of books, opportunity to read to an adult regularly and frequent opportunities for pupils to develop their reading comprehension skills. These are already having an impact, and evidence suggests that pupils are on track to make good and better progress.
- Pupils' attendance has improved over the last few years and is now above the national average. You have good systems for monitoring attendance and punctuality and you use them effectively. Pupils appreciate the range of rewards for good attendance. There is very little persistent absence because of your high expectations and the importance you place on pupils being in school. Where families are struggling, you are firm but supportive and use appropriate sensitivity on an individual family basis. As a result, you have had great success in improving the attendance of those pupils who have needed encouragement.
- Pupils' personal development, behaviour and spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness are strong in school. Conduct around the school building and in classes is of a very high standard. Pupils are polite, kind and thoughtful to each other. Pupils say that they are one 'big family' and that 'the older ones always look after the younger ones'. One pupil commented that everyone is accepted: 'we are really welcoming, everyone should be proud of themselves, everyone, every day'. This is typical of the consideration that pupils have for each other.
- You communicate well with parents. They mentioned how staff are very amenable and how, if needed, you and your team take time to support families. They love the 'inspire' days and the opportunities you have provided for them to learn about how they can help their child learn further, such as the reading and mathematics events you organise. Opportunities to see first-hand what their child is learning and to work alongside them are much appreciated.

- Teachers use their subject knowledge well to provide engaging and motivating activities in class. As a result, pupils have a very good attitude to learning. There is a consistent focus throughout the school on a high standard of presentation and on ensuring that the marking policy is followed.
- Pupils enjoy problem-solving in mathematics and they apply their mathematical skills well. They are encouraged to explain and talk about the skills they use. This they do with enthusiasm and confidence. The importance placed on reading and writing is abundant throughout the school. Corridors and classrooms burst with examples of authors, different types and styles of writing, jottings and ideas that are being worked on by classes, groups or individuals, and celebrations of pupils' work. Pupils are taught strategies to help them get the most out of what they are reading and to help them write to a high standard. For example, in Year 6, pupils were highly motivated by writing detailed descriptive sentences to describe potential leading ladies for 'King Kong' by Anthony Browne. From this work, they inferred character and then had a discussion about whether there were alternative ways of seeing the 'faces' described by them and in the text. Work in pupils' mathematics and writing books indicates good progress over time.
- Most children start early years with skills and knowledge that are below those typical for their age and some well below. There is an excellent quality of provision and teaching offered to Nursery and Reception children. As a result, children make good progress by the time they leave and are well equipped to start in Year 1. There is a wide range of stimulating, good-quality learning experiences available to children and they visibly enjoy engaging in them. As a result, children are happy and keen to learn.
- Your approach of immersing children in books and stories in early years is powerful. As a result, it has a very positive impact on their development of speech, phonics, reading and writing. The effective use of assessment information ensures that teaching is matched closely to children's needs. Adults have very positive relationships with children and also parents, who describe staff as 'incredibly approachable' and the provision as a 'great place for learning in a happy environment'.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils reach the expected standard in reading and more pupils have the opportunity to achieve higher standards in reading, writing, mathematics and grammar, punctuation and spelling at the end of key stage 2
- every opportunity is taken to learn from outstanding practice in teaching and learning.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for Cheshire West and Chester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Eastwood
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher, members of the teaching and learning team and the person responsible for maintaining safeguarding records. I also met with pupils and three governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke to a representative of Cheshire West and Chester local authority on the telephone. We visited lessons and I scrutinised pupils' work. I took account of the 26 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the views of 11 parents spoken to before the school day. I took account of the 23 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and spoke to staff during the day. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school. I looked at a number of documents, including information about pupils' achievement, your school self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, behaviour and incident logs and documents relating to safeguarding.

As part of this inspection, six lines of enquiry were followed:

- How effectively have key issues from the previous inspection been addressed?
- What are leaders doing to improve the relatively low proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading at the end of key stage 2?
- How are leaders helping more pupils achieve higher standards at the end of key stage 2?
- Has the decline in attainment at the end of key stage 1 been analysed and effective action taken to improve the situation?
- How well are disadvantaged pupils supported through school?
- Do pupils make good progress from their starting points in Reception?