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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Ms C Atkins
Headteacher
Shephalbury Park Primary School
Burydale
Broadwater
Stevenage
Hertfordshire
SG2 8AX

Dear Ms Atkins

Short inspection of Shephalbury Park Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 March 2017, 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 March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, and the school's other leaders, are deeply committed to ensuring that the school remains at least good and you have your sights firmly set on becoming an outstanding school in the future. As a result, the school is a happy place where pupils behave well, work hard and achieve well.

Parents are very positive about the school. All the parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, said that they feel that their children are both happy and safe at school. Many parents chose to leave written comments, almost all of which were positive. For example, one parent said, 'My child loves going to school and learning, she is excited to tell me about her day and is really progressing well'. Another parent said, 'I feel my children have had a very positive start to their learning journey. It will be a sad day when it is our time to move on.'

The school has tackled the areas for improvement from the previous inspection well. You have rightly focused on ensuring that the quality of teaching is at least good throughout the school. Your own monitoring, the work in pupils' exercise books, and assessment information, confirm that this is now the case. I also saw evidence of the most able pupils being stretched appropriately and pupils being independent in their learning. For example, in the Reception class, children wrote simple sentences, using their growing knowledge of phonics to help them to try to

spell words. One of the children wrote, 'I went to the parck with my mum and my sisdas', forming a very close approximation of what she wanted to say, without any adult help.

Until recently, the school was part of a federation with another school. For a number of reasons, the schools decided to end their partnership and Shephalbury Park has been a 'stand-alone' primary school since September 2016. One of the changes that the de-federation has brought about is the dissolution of the previous governing body. A new governing body was established and governors took up their posts in September 2016.

The governing body is in the process of establishing itself. Governors have carried out a range of visits to the school and they are already developing a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. However, their strategic understanding of how good or otherwise the school is, is limited. Governors ask questions of you and the school's other leaders, but these are not sufficiently challenging to enable them to hold you fully to account.

In the course of the inspection, I looked at a number of school documents. It is very clear that you spend a great deal of time and energy monitoring all aspects of the school, particularly the quality of teaching and learning. Although monitoring records are plentiful, they are not sufficiently systematic. As a result, monitoring activity has less impact than it could have on raising standards and, therefore, in helping to achieve your ambition for Shephalbury to be an outstanding school. The school's self-evaluation is over-generous in places. Leaders do not take a sufficiently self-critical approach to assessing the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The school's action plan lacks the structure necessary for it to be a key tool for improvement in the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Child protection concerns are taken seriously, appropriate action is taken where necessary, and detailed records kept. Arrangements for the safer recruitment of staff are suitably robust. All the required checks to ensure that only suitable people are employed to work with children are completed in a thorough and timely manner. The school's single central record of these pre-employment checks meets statutory requirements.

Pupils feel very safe at school. They say that bullying does not happen at Shephalbury, but that members of staff help them when friendship problems arise. Pupils are taught about a range of ways to keep themselves safe, including e-safety, road safety and fire safety.

Inspection findings

- In order to check whether the school remains good, I looked at a number of lines of enquiry. The first line of enquiry concerned outcomes in mathematics and

whether current pupils are making good progress in the subject. The rationale for investigating this area was that the key stage 2 national tests in 2016 showed that, although the progress pupils made was broadly average, their overall attainment was below average.

- Leaders have taken a range of suitable actions to improve outcomes in mathematics. For example, leaders are able to demonstrate how an increased focus on teaching arithmetic has led to improvement in pupils' ability to use mental mathematics to answer questions. Similarly, the school's more recent focus on developing reasoning skills is starting to pay dividends. A member of the senior leadership team said that pupils are, 'now more able to think about the maths involved', as a result of the high focus on reasoning in mathematics. It is too soon to see the outcomes of these initiatives in pupils' assessments, but there are early signs that outcomes in mathematics are improving.
- The second area that I focused on was the effectiveness of phonics teaching. In 2015, a higher than average proportion of pupils reached the expected level in the Year 1 phonics screening check. In 2016, however, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected level was below the national average.
- Leaders were disappointed by the 2016 result and have looked carefully at the reasons why fewer pupils than average reached the expected level. Appropriate actions have been taken to ensure that pupils who did not reach the level of the check in Year 1 do so in Year 2, and that a greater proportion of pupils reach the level of the check in the current Year 1.
- The third line of enquiry focused on outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Published data shows variable outcomes for disadvantaged pupils throughout the school. For example, disadvantaged pupils made broadly average progress between key stage 1 and key stage 2 in 2016, but the proportion who reached the expected level in the phonics screening check was well below the national average.
- Assessment information shows clearly that disadvantaged pupils are making good progress. You track the progress of this group of pupils closely to ensure that they make good progress. The pupil premium grant is used effectively and you monitor spending closely to ensure that it has a positive impact on the progress that these pupils make. In some cases, pupils make rapid progress as a result of the additional support or other measures that are put in place.
- The final key line of enquiry focused on how well provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is led and managed, and whether or not this group of pupils make good progress. The area was chosen because, as cohort sizes are so small, the published data gives very little information about this group of pupils.
- You, and the school's special educational needs coordinator, ensure that this area is led well. The special educational needs coordinator is relatively new to the role, but you have ensured that she receives the support necessary to carry out her responsibilities effectively. It is clear that the progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is tracked and monitored thoroughly and regularly. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making good progress from their individual starting points. There are currently

only nine pupils on the school's register who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This is a particularly small proportion of the school's population.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- improve the impact of leadership and management by:
 - developing a more systematic approach to monitoring the quality of teaching and learning
 - ensuring that self-evaluation is appropriately self-critical
 - ensuring that the school's action plan is suitably structured.
- improve the effectiveness of the governing body, so that they are better able to hold the school's leaders to account.

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

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders and a group of governors. I met with the school council and spoke with other pupils during the day. I spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone. I took into account the 49 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and seven responses to the staff survey. I observed teaching and learning in lessons jointly with you and looked at pupils' exercise books. I scrutinised a range of school documents.