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Mrs Helen Hampson
Headteacher
Higher Failsworth Primary School
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Dear Mrs Hampson

Short inspection of Higher Failsworth Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 11 October 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. This is because you and your senior colleagues know the school well. You analyse the performance of pupils and staff regularly, in order to identify and address any weaknesses. For example, you traced the underperformance in writing at key stage 1 to inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. As a result, you took decisive action, which is already leading to improvement in this area of your work. You have also worked successfully to stimulate the interest and raise the standards of boys who were making slow progress in the early years. The governors have provided strong support with this.

Results for disadvantaged pupils have improved and are now more closely in line with those of other pupils in the school. You agreed that it would be helpful to identify more precise targets against which the impact of the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils can be assessed. You provide a very rich and varied curriculum for your pupils. You agreed that there is now a need to develop more precise measures of pupils' progress in subjects other than English and mathematics. Following the last inspection, you have made several revisions to your marking policy. However, when we examined pupils' books, you and I found that it is not being applied consistently.

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is a strength of your school. Every pupil takes part in a play each year and many enjoy regular success in

local speech, drama and music festivals. Pupils take their leadership roles as prefects and members of the school and eco-councils very seriously. They are very enthusiastic about the wide range of sporting activities available to them. Members of the local community also commended the regular involvement of your pupils in charity work.

The behaviour that I saw around the school was consistently good. I was particularly impressed by the high levels of concentration shown by children in the early years as they took part in a discussion. They took turns to present their views and to develop their ideas, in response to skilful questioning from the teacher.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Your records are up to date and detailed.

The pupils I met said that they are happy and safe at the school. They also feel safe on the way to and from school. They know that, if they have worries or concerns, the staff will help them. There have been some incidents of bullying and name-calling but these are dealt with effectively. None of these pupils had encountered any racism in the school. Through the Bikeability programme, they learn how to keep themselves safe on roads. They also know how to keep themselves safe when using the internet and social media and are clear about what to do if they come across unsuitable material. All pupils in Years 5 and 6 receive swimming lessons, so that they are safe in and near water. Pupils know what to do and where to go in the case of a fire and your records show that fire practices are held regularly.

You have succeeded in making the staffing of the school more diverse and representative of the local community. Your records show that you deal vigorously with derogatory name-calling, including homophobic remarks. Where you have had concerns about the possible radicalisation of pupils, you have worked closely with the police. You also liaise regularly with a range of external agencies to support families who need additional help.

All the parents who spoke to me, and almost all those who responded to the online questionnaire, said that their children are happy and safe at the school. I was repeatedly told about how approachable the staff are and how much the children enjoy coming to school. All staff and governors have received the necessary training in safeguarding. The staff I spoke to knew how to identify possible signs of child abuse and were very clear about what they should do if they had any concerns.

Inspection findings

- Since the last inspection, standards in the early years have been below average, although they have improved. A line of enquiry for the inspection was to know the reasons for this and to establish whether recent improvements are set to continue. You showed me that children enter the Nursery with knowledge and skills that are below and sometimes well below what is typical for their age.

Many of them face particular challenges with speech and language. To give these children prompt and regular support, you now employ your own speech and language therapist. You also put considerable emphasis on writing. For example, every time children produce a picture or make a model, they are expected to write a label for it. Your colleagues also place considerable emphasis on developing children's pencil grip, so that they produce well-formed letters and words.

- You have been successful in encouraging more parents to read regularly with their children. To support this, you have extended the range of books in the school and invited parents to come into school to read them to their children. The improvement in performance has also been spurred on by a greater focus on developing children's 'knowledge and understanding of the world'.
- With your encouragement, more children are now attending Nursery full-time. Therefore, more pupils are starting Reception at a higher level than in the past. As a result, standards have risen. The proportion of pupils who achieved a good level of development in 2017 was very close to the national average. Your analysis of the performance of children currently in the early years shows further improvement.
- Another area that I explored with you was the standard of provision in key stage 1. Results in the phonics screening check have been disappointing and declined from 2013 to 2015. In response to this, the school invested in a new reading and writing programme. This, together with the knock-on effect of improvements in the early years, led to a dramatic rise in the phonics results for 2017, with all pupils and each group of pupils performing far better than previously. Your analysis of the performance of pupils currently in Year 1 shows that this improvement is continuing at an increasing rate, not only in phonics but also in reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, pupils are better prepared for key stage 2.
- During their time in key stage 2, your pupils have traditionally made good progress. In 2017, progress in reading was above average and, in writing and mathematics, it was well above the national average. Your analysis of figures for pupils currently in key stage 2 shows that the good progress is being maintained and attainment is also increasing.
- Since the last inspection, pupils' attendance has been inconsistent. In 2016, it was particularly low for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. I was interested to know what the school is doing about this and what the current situation is. You and your staff have worked closely with parents to improve attendance. This includes arranging the daily breakfast club and making early morning calls to specific families to ensure that their children are up in time to come to school. You also make appropriate use of the fixed penalty notices system to tackle unauthorised absence. Your most recent figures show that attendance overall and for specific groups is now broadly in line with the national average. The greater focus on punctuality has also resulted in a drop in the number of pupils arriving late for school.
- The last inspection highlighted the need to ensure that pupils of differing abilities are challenged appropriately. You have a rigorous performance management

system and professional development programme which have been used successfully to maintain and develop the quality of teaching. Where necessary, you have not hesitated to take rigorous action to deal with inadequate teaching. The increasing proportions of pupils reaching the higher standards in external tests show that teachers are now challenging pupils appropriately.

- You provide pupils with a broad and rich curriculum. You are currently involved in a review of all non-core subjects. The work done to date has clarified what is to be taught when. However, there is further work to be done to identify clear criteria for assessing attainment and progress in subjects other than English and mathematics.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the current review of the curriculum includes precise measures for assessing attainment and progress in subjects other than English and mathematics
- the school's marking policy is applied consistently by all teachers
- there are more precise intentions against which the impact of the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils can be assessed.

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

Yours sincerely

Aelwyn Pugh
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held a meeting with you, the associate headteacher and the assistant headteacher. I met the coordinators for mathematics, English and religious education and also spoke to other members of staff. I met the chair and vice-chair of governors, the school's improvement partner and a representative of the local authority. You and I visited lessons to observe teaching and look at books. I discussed safeguarding, behaviour and attendance with you and the safeguarding and pastoral manager. I met a group of eight pupils chosen at random from Years 3 to 6. I spoke to 15 parents as they brought their children to school and examined the 57 responses to the online questionnaire 'Parent View'.