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Mrs J Grant  
Headteacher  
Sandilands Primary School  
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Manchester  
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Dear Mrs Grant

### **Short inspection of Sandilands Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 28 November 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 July 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 are well supported by a dedicated and hard-working governing body that offers challenge and support in equal measure. You want all children to have the skills to succeed in life. Leaders and other staff at your school share this vision. One member of staff noted: 'We are proud to work here. It is a lovely, supportive team.'

The pupils I spoke with were equally proud of their school. They enjoy their lessons and said that teachers are always there to support and help them. The vast majority of parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, reflected this view. A typical comment received was: 'We feel this school provides a really caring and safe learning environment. We have always found staff very helpful and supportive, and we think that the school is very well managed.'

The previous inspection report identified the need for teachers to provide further opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills. This has been tackled in an effective manner. Teachers provide pupils with regular and exciting opportunities which fire their imagination to write at length. Teachers ensure that writing tasks are often linked across the curriculum to the topics that pupils study. As a result of this focused approach, pupils' attainment in writing has improved since the previous inspection. However, as we discussed, there is still more work to do in order to raise pupils' achievement in writing even further.

The previous inspection report also noted that senior leaders needed to share information regularly with the governing body about the progress of all groups of learners. You have successfully tackled this issue. Senior leaders ensure that governors receive detailed and up-to-date information about pupils' progress. As a result, governors now regularly review assessment data. They ask challenging questions and are confident when discussing pupils' attainment and progress with leaders.

We discussed areas where further work is required to support school improvement. We agreed that the school's approaches to self-evaluation and improvement planning are not yet sufficiently refined. This means that leaders, including governors, are not able to focus specifically on the actions required to bring about improvement.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The school site is safe and secure. Leaders undertake regular audits of safeguarding arrangements to ensure that pupils are safe. All required checks on staff and visitors to school are undertaken thoroughly, to ensure that adults in school do not pose any risk to pupils.

Staff and governors receive a broad range of training, which equips them to ensure that pupils remain safe. The school's focus on improving pupils' behaviour has ensured that classrooms are calm and orderly. Nevertheless, some pupils told me that the behaviour of a minority of pupils can adversely affect their learning.

You greatly value the importance of giving pupils a voice within a safe environment. The importance of nurturing and providing pastoral support for pupils is recognised by your whole team. You are justly proud to have received an award for promoting pupils' rights.

You work with dedicated and experienced leaders to provide a nurture unit. This offers care and support to some of your most vulnerable pupils. In this environment, pupils thrive and return to their classrooms with self-belief and confidence. This passion to support the pastoral needs of pupils is best summed up by your improvement partner who noted, 'The headteacher has a relentless determination to provide the best for the children'.

### **Inspection findings**

- The proportion of children, including disadvantaged children, who achieve a good level of development at the end of Reception has been below the national average, but it is increasing year on year. We discussed what leaders are doing to improve the situation. Children enter the school with skills below those typical for their age and with limited experiences. You have recently introduced provision for two-year-olds, which gives them the skills to approach learning successfully. Teachers in Nursery and Reception classes are improving indoor and outdoor provision. There is now a broader range of opportunities to teach reading, writing and mathematics and to encourage children's physical

development. You have ensured that there are enough staff in the early years to allow focused support for those children who struggle with their learning.

- Another area that we discussed was the progress of pupils in key stage 1. In the past, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics has been below the national averages for some groups of pupils. You are fully aware of this issue and are active in dealing with it. You have provided a broad range of training to develop teachers' questioning skills and to broaden their understanding of the teaching of subjects such as phonics. This has had a very positive impact. For example, the number of Year 1 pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, reaching the expected level in the phonics screening check has increased over the last three years. Together with this work, you have also adapted your curriculum to make further improvements. A new approach to teaching mathematics, for example, gives pupils the opportunity to take part in regular problem-solving activities, using a wide range of equipment. Pupils told me that this helps them to learn. Your checks on pupils' books have identified a significant improvement in the standard of their work.
- My next line of enquiry concerned persistent absence. In the past, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils persistently absent from school has been higher than for other pupils nationally. You are tackling this issue with great effect. Leaders and other staff monitor the attendance of this group of pupils closely. Staff maintain regular contact with parents and hold meetings with them when absence becomes a cause for concern. You present certificates and rewards for good attendance. Pupils told me how much they value these rewards. As a consequence of your concerted efforts, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils persistently absent from school is reducing considerably. It is now well below the national average.
- My final line of enquiry focused on the actions that leaders take to ensure that pupils' achievement in writing is improving quickly enough to match their strong achievement in mathematics and reading. Pupils take part in a broad range of visits, to develop their experiences and to provide good stimuli for writing. You put on drama and musical performances in school to develop pupils' confidence and their speaking and listening skills. Staff receive regular training on teaching writing effectively. They speak with enthusiasm about how this improves their teaching. As a result, pupils' books show a good standard of writing across the curriculum. Displays around the school further celebrate extended writing that is linked to subjects such as history and geography. The most recent results in grammar, spelling and punctuation tests at the end of key stage 2 show that attainment has improved and is currently in line with the national average. We agreed, however, that pupils' handwriting skills are not as good as they could be and that some pupils do not have the resilience to write at length.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers accelerate pupils' progress in writing, including that of disadvantaged pupils, by:

- developing pupils' handwriting skills throughout school
- increasing the resilience of pupils when undertaking writing tasks
- leaders sharpen the school's approaches to self-evaluation and planning, so that they and the governing body can more easily check on progress towards improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Gill Pritchard  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher. I also met with three governors, including the chair of the governing body, your business manager and the attendance leader. I spoke to subject leaders and your school's improvement partner. I had an informal discussion with a group of pupils and met with a group of staff.

You and I visited almost all year groups in the school. I visited your nurture unit and observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and as they moved around the school. I scrutinised examples of pupils' work. I reviewed a number of documents and took account of the 28 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I also considered information posted on the school's website.