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Miss Angela Lewis
Headteacher
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Howley Grange Road
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Dear Miss Lewis

Short inspection of Howley Grange Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 30 January 2018, 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 September 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since your appointment as headteacher in September 2016, you have restructured the leadership team. This has enabled you to increase leadership capacity and work effectively to achieving planned improvements. You have worked well with the newly appointed assistant headteachers to form a strong leadership team whose members all talk passionately about the school. You are very clear about why the school is not yet outstanding and you have put plans in place to build on the good quality of education currently being offered to pupils.

Senior leaders are committed to the school values of 'achieve, believe, care', and the strong caring ethos displayed by staff and pupils is testament to this. The school environment is calm, organised and attractive and it is respected and looked after by pupils and staff alike. Displays around school and in classrooms celebrate and reinforce learning.

The strong relationships between staff and pupils promote excellent learning behaviour, which is evident in every class in school. Pupils work well together; they cooperate and support each other in becoming successful learners.

Pupils say they are happy at school and learning is fun. They enjoy the extra-curricular opportunities available to them and talk with enthusiasm about their school.

All of the parents and carers that responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, said their children are happy and well looked after at this school. The vast majority of parents said they would recommend this school to another parent.

The school's previous inspection report judged the school to be good with some outstanding features. These include pupils' behaviour and high levels of attendance and punctuality. These features remain of very high quality in the school. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary; they are respectful, courteous and respond positively to each other, staff and visitors.

The last inspection report identified the need to raise pupils' attainment in mathematics. There have been significant changes to the senior leadership team since the last inspection, but attainment in mathematics across school is much stronger. In 2017, 92% of pupils achieved the expected standard and 31% achieved the higher standard in statutory tests at the end of key stage 2. This figure is above the national figure for all schools.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Safeguarding procedures are thorough and meet all statutory requirements. School staff are up to date with safeguarding training and know the actions to take if they have a concern about a child's well-being. Systems for monitoring staff and pupil usage of the internet are in place and any concerns are swiftly addressed.

The vast majority of parents who responded to Parent View said that their child feels safe at this school. Pupils spoken to during the inspection said they would feel comfortable approaching a member of school staff if they needed help or support.

Pupils talk confidently about online safety, both at school and at home. They are aware that online profiles can be fake and people on the internet may not be who they say they are. Pupils know what bullying is and what to do if they think someone is being bullied. They can talk with good knowledge about how the school promotes anti-bullying.

Inspection findings

- School leaders' evaluation of the schools current strengths and weaknesses is accurate. The school self-evaluation and improvement documents are honest and transparent. Therefore, leaders, including governors, are clear on where they need to focus in order to make improvements across school.
- Leaders have accurately identified that rates of progress for pupils in writing at the end of key stage 2, particularly for boys, are much lower than in mathematics and reading. Leaders have introduced a writing initiative which develops 'pupil talk' in order to improve pupils' writing. School staff have received training in this area and are implementing this approach in classes throughout the school.

However, this initiative is in its early stages and impact has yet to be seen.

- Teachers use their subject knowledge well to provide engaging writing activities. Where teaching is effective, teachers use visual stimuli to motivate and enthuse pupils. High-quality questioning encourages pupils to think at a deeper level about their work. However, the strong practice seen, particularly in Year 6, is not yet consistent across school.
- Teachers focus on developing pupils' knowledge of specific technical aspects of writing, such as 'word classes' and the use of 'ambitious' vocabulary. Teachers recognise that this knowledge helps pupils to be effective writers. However, there is a lack of opportunity for pupils to write independently and at length in order to consistently apply these skills to their writing.
- School leaders have introduced a new system into key stage 1 to make the learning of handwriting easier for everyone. This is beginning to have an early impact on the handwriting of the youngest pupils. At the moment, this is in its early stages and will take time to have an impact throughout school.
- Governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school and support school leaders in achieving planned improvements. They clearly have high ambitions for the school and provide challenge to senior leaders through governing body and committee meetings. Governors each have a responsibility for an area of school improvement and receive training specific to their designated area. Governors are proactive in arranging meetings with school staff and producing reports to present at governing body meetings. Although governors have the knowledge to talk about school weaknesses, they are not always able to provide evidence that their challenge has had an impact on improving weaknesses.
- Disadvantaged pupils make up 11% of the school population, a proportion smaller than the national average. Leaders have high expectations for this small, but important, group of pupils and a comprehensive tracking system is in place to ensure that their progress is closely monitored. As a result, timely intervention is made when there are concerns about a pupils' progress or attainment. Use of the additional funding that school receives is mainly spent on additional staff to further support pupils both in and out of class. As a result, all pupil premium pupils are currently making strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics throughout school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders continue to improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning, particularly in writing, across the school
- there is continued leadership development of the new assistant headteachers and middle leaders so they further develop the ability to lead on driving improvements across school
- progress in writing, particularly for boys, improves so that it is at least in line with the national average by the end of key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Melonie Davies
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspection focused on specific lines of enquiry about:

- how well leaders ensure that pupils, particularly boys, make good progress in writing
- the effectiveness of the teaching of writing
- how leaders ensure that the use of pupil premium funding enables disadvantaged pupils to achieve as well as other pupils nationally
- how well the culture of safeguarding is established throughout school.

During the inspection, I held discussions with the senior leadership team. I met with members of the governing body and held a telephone conversation with the school improvement partner. I spoke to pupils on the playground and also spoke with pupils in lessons. I considered the 76 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also considered responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire. I joined you in short visits to classes to observe learning. I looked through pupils' books and scrutinised documentation, including the school's own evaluation of its performance and the school improvement plan. I scrutinised the school's safeguarding procedures, including policies. I considered the school's checks on the suitability of staff employed in school, and checked the school website.