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Mr Len Hazlehurst
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hazlehurst

Short inspection of Straits Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 March 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. You are highly committed to the school and well respected for the work you undertake. Leaders and governors have worked with determination to make sure that the school has continued to move forward and build on its strengths. Pupils benefit from effective teaching in a friendly, happy and supportive atmosphere. Lessons are purposeful, and pupils achieve well. You have enhanced the skills and talents of the staff team and make sure they have the support to do their best. All staff who responded to the Ofsted survey said they were proud to be a member of the school.

You have built effectively on the strengths found in the last inspection. Of particular note is the approach to teaching phonics, which has been highly successful. The outcomes in phonics have been well above the national average for the last three years. The school is popular in the locality and you have expanded the school and increased the number of children entering the early years since 2016.

You have improved pupils' confidence when exploring and finding things out for themselves. During this inspection, I saw pupils showing initiative, making decisions and working independently and collaboratively. For example, in a Year 1 class, pupils were able to explore multiplication with their partners and without adult support. You were asked to ensure that pupils used their mathematical skills in different subjects. You have addressed this effectively. For example, Year 5 pupils have calculated the rations needed and distance covered in their topic of explorers.

The actions taken to improve outcomes in mathematics have resulted in above average attainment overall at the end of Years 2 and 6 in 2017.

You have tackled the recommendations arising from the previous inspection well. You were asked at the last inspection to develop leadership roles within the school. During the inspection, I saw the positive impact of this and you have very effectively developed the role of the faculty leaders. Their views on the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils are accurate. They provide staff with clear guidance on how to improve their practice. Furthermore, their analysis notes the impact teaching is having on outcomes for pupils, including disadvantaged pupils.

You were also asked to ensure that pupils are well prepared for life in the culturally diverse British society of today. Through careful curriculum planning, staff develop pupils' understanding of diversity and promote British values. This helps pupils to build their confidence and readiness for their future lives. Pupils have a good understanding of other cultures and those with different religious beliefs. A Year 6 pupil talked with enthusiasm and knowledge about a trip to a synagogue.

Parents greatly appreciate and value the support their children receive. The parents who spoke to me at the end of the day and those who commented online were overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of the school. A typical comment from a parent was, 'We are delighted with all aspects of the schooling at the Straits Primary School. We feel privileged that our child attends a school which has high standards of education while adopting a warm and supportive environment. All members of staff are approachable and genuinely care about the educational, social and emotional needs of the children.'

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders, including governors, place safeguarding as the highest priority for the school. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. A strong culture of safety and security pervades the school as a result. Governors and leaders check the school's work to keep children safe regularly. Staff understand the need to protect pupils from risk and know pupils extremely well.

Leaders and governors ensure that all the required checks and training are in place to support all staff and volunteers. A rigorous system of induction enhances staff and volunteers' understanding of how to keep children safe in school. Records are detailed and well maintained.

Pupils talk confidently about how the school keeps them safe. They explain how staff listen and help solve problems when they occur. Pupils report that bullying is very rare. One pupil commented: 'Bullying is very rare. It is definitely taken very seriously indeed, and staff would immediately sort it out.' Pupils attend school regularly. Parents who responded to the Parent View survey agreed overwhelmingly that the school looks after pupils well, they are happy and feel safe.

Inspection findings

- You provide strong leadership, ably supported by the deputy headteacher and other leaders, and have an accurate and realistic understanding of the school's current performance. As a result, the key lines of enquiry for this inspection came as no surprise to you. You are ambitious and hold high expectations for what pupils can achieve. You and your team undertake a range of activities to monitor the impact of leaders' and teachers' work. You know how well pupils in each class are doing and you hold teachers to account effectively for this.
- Your approach to key school improvement priorities is well considered. Pupils' achievement in writing at the end of 2017, although at least in line with the national average, was not as high as reading and mathematics. The consistent and coherent approach to the teaching of writing means that pupils currently in the school are making good progress in their development of these skills, including when writing in subjects such as science and history. For example, in Year 6 pupils spoke with enthusiasm about the Greek myths they had written in their history lesson.
- I saw the impact of actions taken to increase writing progress for all pupils. Pupils are given time to write for sustained periods. Work in pupils' books, including those of boys and middle-ability pupils, shows that pupils are taught to use different genres and styles of writing. For example, they have written diary extracts, fact files, viewpoints, persuasive leaflets and recounts. Pupils are able to identify key features of texts. Written work is displayed around the school to celebrate the children becoming authors. For example, pupils aspire to have their work displayed on the 'Star Writers' board. Pupils' work is consistently well presented and there has been a marked improvement in handwriting across the school. Pupils typically acquire a strong understanding of grammar, spelling and punctuation. However, you accurately identified some pupils are not skilled in applying this to unfamiliar contexts. On occasion, pupils do not apply their spelling knowledge accurately in their writing.
- In the early years, the percentage of pupils who achieved a good level of development dipped from above average in 2015 and 2016 to below average in 2017. Leaders quickly identified the reasons for this. During the inspection, the experienced early years leader provided a range of evidence to explain the dip, including a detailed analysis of children's progress. Children join the early years with skills and knowledge which vary but the majority enter with skills that are typical for their age. However, the school has expanded, fifteen additional places were opened in 2016 and more children entered with lower starting skills. Nevertheless, evidence shows these children made good progress from their individual starting points.
- Effective teaching in the early years successfully builds on children's early knowledge and skills. As a result, children, including boys, make good progress from their starting points. Imaginative and well-planned activities successfully engage children. A real strength is the development of children's phonic skills. Highly effective teaching of phonics prepares children well for learning to read and write. Activities are then planned which require children to apply and develop

sounds taught in writing and reading. Children working in the number and writing areas during the inspection demonstrated good levels of concentration and independence. Parents are very appreciative of the induction process before children start school, which enables them to settle quickly into school life.

- Behaviour is a strength of the school and staff have high expectations of behaviour which pupils adhere to. Pupils are very friendly, well-mannered and respectful. They behave very well in lessons, at playtimes and lunchtimes. Relationships across the school between adults and pupils and between pupils themselves are strong. Pupils are happy and enjoy school, and they attend school regularly. Pupils spoke with maturity about 'The Straits Model Citizen' and how it helps pupils to have a good understanding of respect, tolerance, right and wrong and the principles of good citizenship. One pupil commented: 'Everybody is equal whatever religion, race or belief. We are very respectful to everyone.'
- Pupils enjoy an interesting and well-balanced curriculum, which is enriched through trips and clubs that broaden pupils' horizons and promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education well. This includes a residential visit in Year 6, which enhances pupils' learning, social skills and teamwork well. Pupils discussed with enthusiasm about learning to play the violin. Pupils also talked about sporting activities they had undertaken. For example, they had an opportunity to take part in fencing. Pupils are proud to take on additional responsibilities such as head boy and girl, prefects and school council members.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the successful strategies to develop pupils' writing skills are further embedded
- pupils are supported to use and apply their knowledge of grammar and punctuation to extended pieces of writing
- pupils are consistently accurate in their use of spelling.

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

Sarah Somers
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher and other leaders and five governors, and had a telephone call with a representative from the local authority. I observed pupils learning in lessons and looked at examples of pupils' work. I met with a group of pupils and spoke with other pupils during

lessons. I scrutinised a variety of documents including safeguarding, the school's development plan, the school's own evaluation of its performance and records of checks made on the suitability of staff to work with children. I took account of responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire from 80 parents and carers. I also spoke to parents at the end of the school day. I considered the responses to Ofsted's staff survey.