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Mrs Sue Nesbitt-Larking  
Headteacher  
Mill Mead Primary School  
Port Vale  
Hertford  
Hertfordshire  
SG14 3AA

Dear Mrs Nesbitt-Larking

### **Short inspection of Mill Mead Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 27 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 April 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

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

You provide strong leadership for staff and pupils. Your passion to enable pupils to develop as individuals, make good progress across a broad and balanced curriculum, and develop key life skills is clearly evident throughout the school. You are rightly proud of the impact of your '6Rs', and it is clear from speaking to pupils that they are grateful for the strategies that you put in place to help them to become resourceful, responsible, respectful, ready, resilient and reflective. Pupils particularly value the care and support that they receive from their teachers. One pupil commented: 'It doesn't matter which teacher you have, because all of them are really good with us and take care of us.' Pupils are well behaved and have very positive attitudes to learning. They are proud of their school and they are excellent ambassadors, both in and outside of the classroom.

You are determined to ensure that your school is inclusive and that strong relationships between adults, pupils and the wider community support all pupils to do well. Pupils, parents, staff and governors are highly positive about your leadership. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, agree that your school is well led and managed and that they would recommend it to other parents. Your staff are proud to work at Mill Mead and they value the support and challenge with which you provide them.

They particularly welcome the training that they receive and the impact that it has on them, both as teachers and leaders.

You know the school's strengths and weaknesses and your plans set out a range of appropriate actions that will continue to drive improvements. With the support of governors, you have added capacity to the school's senior leadership team through the creation of two new roles. Your focus now is to develop greater consistency in the effectiveness of middle leaders. You acknowledge that the changes to your leadership structures are still relatively new and that they need to be embedded before their impact is fully evident.

You have continued to develop the school's educational provision since your previous inspection. Your work to improve the outcomes of the most able pupils in reading, writing and mathematics has been successful. In 2017, the attainment of this cohort of pupils at the end of key stages 1 and 2 was in line with, and often above, the attainment of pupils with similar starting points nationally. You have also developed more effective links with parents. As a consequence, a large majority of parents who responded to Parent View stated that they now receive valuable information about their child's progress. Attainment and progress in writing have also improved, as has the quality of pupils' handwriting and presentation. However, the quality of extended writing seen in English has not been consistently transferred to other subjects and remains one of your priorities for development.

Governors provide you with effective support and challenge. They know the school well, share your inclusive vision and are proud of the school's reputation within the local community. They support the school's development through their contributions at full governing body meetings, their various committees and their visits to meet school leaders. You are all in agreement of the need to ensure that the recent changes to leadership structures are embedded and that progress in key stage 1 mathematics improves. You are also committed to ensuring that teachers' planning takes into account more effectively all pupils' different starting points.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Pupils are unanimous about the fact that they are safe at school. The staff who I met with and every parent who responded to Parent View agree. Pupils say that, on the rare occasions it happens, bullying is dealt with swiftly and effectively. They state that they attend a caring school and that there is always someone to help them if needed. One pupil said that teachers 'care more about us than themselves'. They value their personal, social and health education curriculum that covers topics such as road safety, relationships and bullying.

Governors have a clear understanding of their safeguarding duties and they are effective in carrying them out. Leaders undertake all appropriate recruitment checks and ensure that staff are well trained and know how to identify any signs that pupils

are at risk. Staff understand the school's systems for reporting concerns and they state that safeguarding is a fundamental part of the school's culture. Safeguarding records are well kept and child protection referrals are followed up robustly.

### **Inspection findings**

- I pursued a number of lines of enquiry to ascertain whether the school continues to be good. My first question related to the extent to which the quality of teaching is improving and its impact on the progress of pupils whose attainment at the start of key stages 1 and 2 is broadly average.
- As a result of close monitoring and support, leaders accurately identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses. Training and coaching is targeted precisely at teachers' needs and has made them much more aware of the support required by pupils of average prior attainment. Teachers are now more skilled at using assessment information and tracking the progress of these pupils. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection.
- In the majority of lessons, teachers and teaching assistants question pupils skilfully and use their understanding of the subject to tackle any misconceptions that pupils may have. Average-attaining pupils have as positive attitudes to learning as other pupils. They get on well with their teachers and their peers. They are prepared to take risks and make mistakes in order to make progress.
- Leaders' assessment records demonstrate that the overall progress of pupils of average prior attainment has improved throughout the school. This group of pupils say that they make good progress and they can explain how they know this, for example through praise from their teacher. Parents agree, with the vast majority of respondents to Parent View stating that their children are taught well and make good progress. However, there are examples, both in lessons and in pupils' books, where progress is less strong. When this is the case, it is often because work in lessons does not challenge pupils sufficiently. As a consequence, the progress of middle-attaining pupils is still not as rapid as other groups of pupils in the school.
- A second line of enquiry related to the impact of leaders' actions to improve progress in mathematics at key stage 2. Effective leadership, monitoring and additional support for pupils now result in pupils making improved progress in mathematics. Leaders now have a greater understanding of the reasons why pupils' progress slows and they also ensure that teachers receive support in any areas of mathematics where they feel less confident.
- Pupils in key stage 2 say that they enjoy mathematics and that they find it challenging. Work in their books is at the appropriate level for their ages and abilities and it is clear that they make progress over time, for example as they move on successfully to more complex mathematical topics. Teachers' strong subject knowledge is evident as they explain key concepts to pupils and question them carefully.
- Leaders' assessment records also demonstrate that pupils make good progress in mathematics across key stage 2. As a consequence, pupils in Year 6 are currently attaining at a higher level than similar pupils did at this point last year. Although

leaders have acted to improve progress in mathematics at key stage 2, their own assessment records indicate that the rate of pupils' progress in mathematics at key stage 1 is currently not as strong.

- Finally, I wanted to check how effective leaders have been in their work to support children to make continued good progress in early years. Teachers and teaching assistants know the children well and they support their development effectively. They provide children with a safe and nurturing environment, which enables them to develop a wide range of skills, for example negotiation, speech and language, confidence and numeracy. As a result, the proportion of children on track to attain a good level of development across the different areas of learning is higher than that of similar children this time last year.
- The early years team regularly observes children in order to assess how quickly they are developing and to see if they need extra help. This ensures that children make good progress. However, sometimes children do not make the rapid progress they are capable of because activities are not challenging enough.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers plan work more effectively so that it is more challenging, especially for children in early years and pupils with average prior attainment in key stages 1 and 2
- the recent changes made to leadership structures are embedded, so that leaders at all levels are even more effective in driving developments such as the use of writing across the curriculum
- rates of progress increase in key stage 1 mathematics.

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

Daniel Gee  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, school leaders, other school staff, governors, groups of pupils and a representative from the local authority. Together, we made short visits to a wide range of classes to observe teaching, to look at pupils' books and to see pupils at work. In addition, I reviewed a sample of key stage 2 mathematics workbooks alongside school leaders. I scrutinised the school's evaluation of its own effectiveness, its development plan and other documentation,

including the record of pre-employment checks and child protection records. I also considered the 130 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, from parents.