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Mr Ian Barton
Executive Headteacher
Plumberow Primary Academy
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Dear Mr Barton

Short inspection of Plumberow Primary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 14 June 2018 with Diane Hawkes, Ofsted Inspector, 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 March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

Your school is welcoming and inclusive; your pupils feel valued and are rightly proud of their school. You and your senior leaders ensure that the learning environment is vibrant and celebratory. Pupils access a carefully planned, broad curriculum through which they experience many engaging activities that deepen their understanding of the world around them. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They are polite and friendly towards each other and towards the adults who work with them. Pupils listen carefully in their lessons and try hard to do their best. Pupils are confident and articulate. They talk positively about their time in school and the activities they enjoy most. Your kind, caring and happy pupils are a credit to the school and community.

Parents and carers are positive about the school. They praised the curriculum and the ability of the school's staff, who they recognise as approachable and responsive to concerns. Parents feel included and particularly value the provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. They are positive about the values that the school promotes and many commented on their children's increased confidence and independence. As one parent said of the teachers, 'They make good choices for the children.' The overwhelming majority of parents would recommend the school to others.

You and your team are uncompromising in your drive to raise standards across the school. Following your aim to further improve the quality of teaching, better use is made of learning time and progress is now quicker. You have taken steps to develop a curriculum that carefully builds key skills and, through challenge, gives pupils the opportunity to apply this learning at a level appropriate to their understanding and ability. The school's newly adopted approach to teaching mathematics is an example of this. Early indications are positive about its impact on pupil's progress. Your effective leadership team is well informed and has contributed fully to the decisions that have been taken recently to improve the quality of provision throughout the school. Staff are effective and reflective practitioners, who are continuously improving outcomes for your pupils.

Your school has made good progress in addressing the findings from your previous inspection. Inspectors saw evidence of good-quality work throughout the school. However, published data continues to show that progress, while improving, is not as strong as it could be for some groups of pupils. You are aware of this and now track learning more thoroughly and use carefully chosen teaching strategies to make sure that your disadvantaged pupils make progress more rapidly.

Pupils enjoy coming to school, and attendance is considerably better than the national average. You have secure systems in place for checking on pupil absence. You carry out regular analysis of attendance trends, set targets and, when necessary, hold meetings with parents. As a result, the rate of absenteeism for disadvantaged pupils is reducing, and the rate of persistent absenteeism is very low.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your team have made sure that all of the school's staff understand their responsibilities regarding safeguarding. They are vigilant and proactive. Your record-keeping is careful and detailed. Recruitment processes are secure, and all statutory requirements are met. A recent safeguarding audit found very minor areas for improvement, which leaders addressed immediately.

Your pupils feel safe in school. The premises are maintained securely and pupils are appropriately supervised at all times. Parking in and around the school was deemed a safety issue by the community. As a result, your pupil council led a successful campaign, which resulted in improvements being made. Parents and pupils said that bullying is not commonplace and that the school responds sensitively to problems should they arise. Pupils have a good understanding of school values, such as caring for others and being good citizens.

Inspection findings

- We explored a number of lines of enquiry in this inspection. The first of these was to do with English teaching and the ways in which you are bringing about improvements in reading and writing. Published key stage 2 school data

indicates good pupil attainment, but progress, particularly for boys, has not been so strong.

- Teachers now provide more opportunities for pupils to write at length across the school. There were plenty of examples of extended writing for a variety of purposes. Inspectors observed many examples of good-quality writing. Good progress for pupils in Year 6 was evident, and many were using advanced vocabulary and varied sentence structures in their work.
- The teaching of phonics in key stage 1 and in the early years is a strength. The result of this is that a very high proportion of pupils achieve the expected standard by the end of Year 1.
- Children are encouraged to read more often, and the school has a motivational scheme that rewards frequent readers. The most able discussed their reading with confidence and demonstrated a good understanding of their books. The school has adopted a new approach to developing comprehension skills, which has proved effective. For example, in a Year 4 English lesson, pupils were writing their own 'where', 'who', 'when' and 'why' questions in response to a piece of shared reading, which resulted in effective learning.
- My second line of enquiry was to review the provision for disadvantaged pupils. The progress gap between this group of pupils and other pupils in the school is diminishing. You keep thorough records of the progress that your disadvantaged pupils make, which means that you and your staff have a good understanding of their needs and any difficulties they face in their learning.
- You are using additional funding well to provide more targeted intervention and additional activities to those pupils who need a boost or support to catch up with their learning. This work has resulted in increased self-confidence and improved attainment for many pupils and stronger relationships between home and school.
- The inspection team also looked at the school's provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make strong progress. A school priority has been to ensure consistent practice across the school. This has been successful because there have been improvements in the way in which information is shared throughout the school and, consequently, staff are fully engaged with new initiatives.
- Finally, we wanted to check on curriculum development since the previous inspection.
- There are real strengths in the way that the curriculum is being led in English and mathematics. Leaders have a clear view of what the best provision should look like and are purposeful in introducing challenge to secure improvements in teaching and learning. The curriculum is less well developed in other subjects, where progress for pupils is not as strong. In subjects other than English and mathematics, teachers do not fully adapt their planning to meet all pupils' learning needs. Subject leaders all share a commitment to developing assessment and securing challenge in the curriculum. However, this work is at an early stage of development.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the strategy to develop the wider curriculum continues so that all work is suitably challenging to enable all pupils to make the progress they are capable of.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

James Richards
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

This inspection was carried out by a team of two inspectors. Our inspection activities included meetings with curriculum subject leaders, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), and members of staff with responsibility for safeguarding and attendance.

We carried out joint learning walks with senior leaders in all areas of the school, briefly visiting most classes. We looked in depth at a range of pupils' books and listened to readers from Years 2, 4 and 5.

We were able to refer to a range of the school's documents. These included development planning and documentation relating to assessment, SEN, behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

We spoke to parents and pupils in the playground and met the school council. We also took note of the 200 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaires.

I held discussions about the school's self-evaluation and development plans with you and your leadership team, and we discussed the key lines of enquiry for the inspection. I also held a telephone conversation with a trustee from the Academies Enterprise Trust and a meeting with a governor.