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Mrs Johanne Clifton
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Dear Mrs Clifton

Short inspection of Billesley Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 26 June 2018 with Karen O'Keefe, 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 June 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You lead the school exceptionally well and have developed many aspects of the school's provision since the last inspection. Enhancements to the curriculum have meant that the learning experience for pupils is engaging, dynamic and carefully tailored to their needs. Pupils are excited about learning and enjoy the opportunities provided to excel. High standards of teaching ensure that pupils make strong progress from their starting points, across a wide range of subjects. Pupils' progress in reading has, in the recent past, lagged a little behind mathematics and writing. However, a spotlight on the teaching of reading has resulted in an improving picture. Nevertheless, leaders recognise that there is still more work to do to inspire and encourage some pupils who are reluctant to read.

The comment of the chair of governors, that 'we're all in it together', accurately reflects the commitment and dedication of the whole staff team in creating an exceptional place of learning where pupils thrive. Leaders at all levels have high aspirations of what pupils can do. Consequently, pupils rise to the challenge and achieve well. There is a culture of 'no excuses' and a genuine belief among staff

that pupils will be successful. Leaders' refinements to assessment practices mean that teachers are very responsive to pupils' feedback during lessons. Teachers adapt learning accordingly and resolve misconceptions quickly at the point at which they arise, and this helps pupils to succeed quickly in their learning.

Teachers use innovative ways to engage and motivate pupils to learn. There is a real sense of purpose in lessons. Pupils remain focused, have a clear understanding about what they are learning and work collaboratively to support one another. Teachers ask pupils probing questions that encourage them to think deeply. Pupils listen attentively to one another, although they are not afraid to debate and sensitively challenge the views of their classmates. Pupils' conduct in lessons is exemplary.

You have managed the school's expansion well and have made changes to the leadership structure to sustain the momentum of improvement. You have established a talented leadership team who are instrumental in bringing about improvements in their areas of responsibility. They coach and support less experienced staff, providing guidance so that they can carry out their roles well. Results from the staff survey show that morale is high, and staff enjoy working at the school. They recognise how leaders have created the right climate where teachers are trusted to be adventurous and innovate in ways that are right for pupils.

Parents are highly supportive of the school and recognise the improvements that you and other leaders have made over time. They appreciate the benefits that these changes have brought to their children, and they particularly value the level of care staff show towards pupils. The responses from the parent survey were overwhelmingly positive and identified many great features of the school, including the school's leadership, their children's enjoyment attending school and the tireless work of the teachers. The latter point is captured rather well by one parental comment that 'This is a wonderful school where the teachers are superheroes.'

At the school's last inspection, leaders were tasked with improving further the quality of teaching and raising pupils' achievement. You have addressed these areas very effectively. There has been a year-on-year improvement in the percentage of pupils attaining a good level of development in the early years, and the proportion of Year 1 pupils meeting the expected standard in phonics exceeded the national average in 2017. Progress rates in key stage 2 were above average in writing and mathematics, and the percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard or higher in reading, writing and mathematics combined at the end of key stage 2 was above the national average in both 2016 and 2017.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All staff have a clear understanding about their roles and responsibilities in keeping pupils safe. Leaders ensure that appropriate training is provided for staff and governors on

a regular basis. The training programme is informed by what leaders know about the specific needs of pupils. The safeguarding policy is current and reflects the guidance issued by the Secretary of State. All concerns about pupils are carefully logged and followed up swiftly and thoroughly, through to conclusion. Leaders request support and advice from other statutory agencies when appropriate and are persistent in obtaining this when agencies are slow to respond.

Leaders are proactive in the early identification of vulnerable pupils and put in place the necessary support as a preventative measure. The curriculum includes many planned opportunities to teach pupils about how to stay safe. This is effective in helping pupils to learn to live safely and make healthy choices.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have worked hard to review and overhaul the school's approach to the teaching of reading. The new strategy is working well and equipping pupils with the necessary skills to become fluent, competent and reflective readers. Teachers have benefited from training which has led to sharper teaching, more focused on specific reading skills and the development of pupils' vocabulary. This is proving successful and is reflected in pupils' increased rates of progress.
- Teachers make effective use of assessment information to identify pupils who need additional support for their reading. They provide a range of extra help for these pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, to enable them to catch up. Some of the most skilled teachers of reading are carefully matched to support vulnerable readers who find reading very challenging. This helps to ensure that these pupils have the best possible chance of overcoming their barriers to learning.
- Leaders have planned and implemented a raft of initiatives to raise the profile of reading and encourage pupils, especially boys, to read widely and often. This has included a fun 'comic, bake and shakes' event and investment in digital learning materials to promote pupils' engagement. However, despite this work, there is still a core of pupils who are less likely to read for pleasure. These pupils do not read as regularly, which limits the amount of progress that they make. In some classrooms, the reading environment is enticing, attractive and appeals to pupils. In other classrooms, book corners are less inspiring.
- Experienced subject leaders make an impressive contribution to the development of teaching and learning across the curriculum. The passion that they have for their subjects is plain to see through the rich learning experiences on offer. The school's exciting and varied curriculum brings learning alive and strongly supports pupils' academic and personal development.
- Teachers plan and deliver innovative cross-curricular units of work which engage and enthuse pupils. For example, pupils worked on a project called 'I am me, we are us'. They worked alongside an artist to develop their digital media skills and they have created some superb photographic images around the themes of respect, tolerance and family. Teachers are adept at building in ways to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is a strength of the

school.

- For the past few years, pupils' attendance has remained stubbornly below the national average figures. Similarly, the proportion of pupils persistently absent has also been a concern. This academic year, you have had a real drive on encouraging good attendance, and the effort has been worth it. Leaders now track attendance rigorously, providing staff with half-termly reports which help to keep close checks on those pupils whose attendance needs to improve. A whole range of incentives encourage pupils to attend, although the view of leaders is, quite rightly, about making the school 'the place the children want to be' through an engaging, well-planned curriculum.
- This year, there has been a striking increase in pupils' attendance, bringing it in line with the national average. In addition, there has been a noticeable reduction in the persistent absence rate. Persistent absence is now below the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers further embed strategies for improving reluctant readers' engagement with books and other reading material so that they read more regularly.

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 Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tim Hill
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors held discussions with you and other senior leaders about the school's self-evaluation, development plan and current priorities. An inspector met with one of the designated leaders responsible for safeguarding to discuss the school's arrangements for child protection. I held a meeting with local governors, including the chair of the local governing body, and the trust's director of education. I also met with four other leaders to discuss the curriculum. I talked to several staff about how they keep pupils safe. Inspectors observed learning in several groups. Some of these observations were undertaken jointly with school leaders. Inspectors talked to pupils about their work and looked at a wide range of books across the breadth of the curriculum. They considered the 24 responses from the pupil survey. One inspector listened to several pupils read, and discussed their

reading habits.

Inspectors evaluated a wide range of documents, including the school's development plan, coaching plans, pupils' assessment information, governors' documentation and records related to safeguarding. The views of parents were considered through the 43 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and 26 free-text comments. An inspector also talked to parents on the playground at the start of the school day. The opinions of staff were gathered through the 35 responses to the staff survey.