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Mrs Georgina Frost
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Frost

Short inspection of Park Hall Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 January 2016, 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 January 2011.

This school continues to be good.

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

I was very impressed by your very strong and highly effective leadership and that of your deputy headteacher and senior staff. You are clearly steering the school towards becoming an outstanding primary school. I know that your school will shortly become an academy when it joins St Bart's Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), and parents have been fully informed and are very supportive of this. The MAT is already providing you and your staff with many productive opportunities to forge strong links with other schools and academies. This is enabling staff to see and share best practice, and I know that following our joint observations of teaching during this inspection, you have a vast amount of strong practice across the school. You have successfully nurtured, supported and challenged your staff to provide nothing less than good teaching and your learning support assistants provide very effective support and teaching. Well done.

All the parents I spoke to at the start of the inspection were very pleased with the quality of education and high levels of care and attention that you and your staff provide. Many have written to me with tributes paid to you and your staff, with one notable commentary about the quality of your leadership when one parent wrote, 'The school is run by a brilliant headteacher who can't do enough for the school and

seems to always be finding ways to improve the school'. Parents are right: school improvement is visionary, purposeful and effective.

You, your staff and governors clearly demonstrate your commitment to pupils and their families. You are all passionate about the school's values, which are cited around the school and state that, 'All members of the Park Hall family contribute to the life of our happy, friendly and successful school'. Indeed it is a successful school. It is very apt to see posted at the front of the school that, 'Every day counts, every minute matters', as a measure of the urgency and ambition you all have in ensuring that you always aim to provide pupils with high-quality education and welfare.

Your early years staff team has maintained the high-quality provision for Nursery and Reception children that was seen the last time the school was inspected in 2011. The leadership of the early years is outstanding. These strong foundations in the early years prepare the youngest children very well for success in later learning, particularly in their development of language and literacy. As pupils move up the school, they reach high standards in reading by the end of Year 2 and Year 6 and well above average standards in writing. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection in 2011, because at that time inspectors commented on relative weaknesses in pupils' writing by the end of Year 2. In addition, you and your staff have improved significantly the way that letters and sounds are taught (phonics), which now provides the bedrock of the skills that pupils need to become independent and highly competent readers. Your leaders and staff recognise that, despite achieving above-average standards in mathematics, these could be higher and you are now focusing your efforts on improving pupils' mental and oral arithmetic skills, as well as planning more challenging problem-solving work in lessons.

Pupils are energised by what the school offers and their enjoyment of school is reflected in their very high attendance rates and excellent behaviour. Pupils confidently talked to me about their work and progress. I was particularly impressed by the high standards of reading and writing achieved by a group of pupils in Years 5 and 6. They read aloud from their own writing books with fluency and confidence. Their story-writing was lively, imaginative and interesting with accurate punctuation that helped them to read with expression. Your school values pupils' efforts and contributions and this is evident in the many and varied high-quality displays of work that adorn classrooms, corridors, work areas and halls. Your staff have managed successfully to raise the profile of literacy. Displays of pupils' book reviews and illustrations depict their interest in a wide range of books, genres and authors.

Together with your skilful governing body, you have made sure that you are all committed to continuous improvement. You are tenacious in your determination to provide the very best for pupils and their families, with particularly strong support and interventions planned for disabled pupils, and those who have additional learning needs or special educational needs. The provision made for disabled pupils or pupils with special educational needs is expertly managed and overseen by a highly competent inclusion manager.

Sharp and accurate evaluations of what is working well and what needs to improve inform your development and action plans. These plans provide you and your governors with a clear route map towards your ambitions to improve the school still further.

Safeguarding is effective.

Your staff and governors are vigilant in ensuring that pupils are safe and secure in school. Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and robust, including the electronic visitor reporting system in the school's reception area. Staff vetting procedures are up to date and include robust checks on visitors, volunteers, governors and supply staff. You and your governors make sure that policies are updated and reviewed. The indoor and outdoor areas, including the excellent resources and areas available for early years children, are clean, safe and secure.

Inspection findings

- The preparations for the forthcoming conversion to becoming an academy as part of the St Bart's Multi-Academy Trust are rightly communicated to your parents and community as, 'Continuing the learning journey together'. The values that lie at the heart of everything your school does remain ambitious as you and your governors prepare for this academisation. 'Heart' is a most appropriate acronym that is embedded in your core values that lie at the 'heart' of the school's purpose, representing, as you know, 'Honesty, Enjoyment, Achievement, Respect and Teamwork'.
- Having improved pupils' writing skills in the early years and throughout the school, you have, rightly, shone a spotlight on improving achievement in mathematics still further. National test results and teachers' assessments show improving standards in mathematics. Nonetheless, the progress pupils make is relatively slower when compared with reading and writing.
- Your accurate evaluations and monitoring identify that pupils' mental calculation skills are not as highly developed as their reading and writing skills. Teachers are adapting their lessons to address this by providing more opportunities for pupils to practise their mental arithmetic skills. This is already improving pupils' learning in mathematics but there is still room for more improvement. As seen in reading, the most-able pupils have the potential to reach very high standards in mathematics. However, these pupils are not used to applying logical methods to solving more challenging problems and rely too heavily on trial and error.

- You and your deputy headteacher were, rightly, very impressed and proud of the work shared by some of your pupils when they read aloud to us from their writing books. These pupils in Years 5 and 6 wrote interesting and evocative stories that included flavourful extracts of high-quality form and structure, such as, 'Outside the barrier of steel, under the scorching volcano...', and, 'There was silence. His hands trembling like a leaf, teeth chattering and his heart racing...', 'Come my friends, and gather around, as I tell you a tale of how a dream land turns into a nightmare'. These and many more examples in pupils' books and on displays demonstrate the outcomes of some highly effective teaching and learning.
- You have ensured that staff improve both the academic and personal development and welfare of all pupils. You all treat every pupil as an individual and there is a strong commitment to improving pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils' work and displays show that core British values of democracy, respect and tolerance of all major faiths, customs and beliefs are taught and embedded in the school's highly effective and creative curriculum. The Park Hall Parliament, which is equivalent to what many schools refer to as a school council, involves an elected group of pupils across Years 1 to 6 who have a big say in the school's curriculum and the work of the school. Pupils are mature, exceptionally well behaved and attentive. They are very proud of their school and many said to me that it is easy to make and keep friendships.
- The school's junior leadership team is a wonderful and democratic initiative comprising pupils who act as ambassadors to support other pupils and act as role models. This accounts for the views expressed by some pupils, who told me that they feel safe and trusted because they can go to adults or junior leaders. These junior leaders also take part in staff and governor meetings, and alongside staff they monitor, for example, what is happening in the playground and feed their evaluations back to teaching staff as areas for improvement.
- You and your staff provide an innovative and creative curriculum that inspires pupils. You rightly call this 'the wow factor', as it gives pupils many opportunities to thrive and thoroughly enjoy the many and varied activities, topics and subjects of the curriculum. You are very clear in your commitment to the school's values when stating that, 'We have high aspirations for all children,' and you are firm and tenacious about achieving what you believe to be essentially, 'high-quality learning and teaching that promote excitement and enthusiasm for learners'. You and your staff embrace and skilfully apply the core aims of what you call 'assertive mentoring'. Pupils respond very positively in lessons and at other times. Assertive mentoring is an ambitious approach to teaching and learning and develops what you believe to be 'expert learners'. These characteristics and learning behaviours enable pupils to thrive and mature as well as make good progress in all subjects and in additional activities such as the creative, performing and fine arts.

- Pupils also achieve well in music and sport through expert instrumental music tuition provided by visiting specialists, and highly skilled sports coaches who provide sport and physical education lessons. I was particularly impressed by the large ensemble of pupils receiving expert instruction during an orchestral rehearsal of stringed instruments in the hall during the inspection.
- The school development plan sets out the right priorities for improvement. You and your senior leaders monitor teaching systematically. Governors are involved and very knowledgeable. They receive accurate reports on the quality of teaching and its impact on pupil outcomes. Assessment information is accessible to staff and governors and provides accurate details of the progress pupils make and what they are expected to achieve. Your staff and leaders have recognised the core reasons for improving still further pupils' achievement in mathematics and this is based on thorough and accurate evaluations of pupils' work and progress.
- The school works effectively with the Britannia Teaching School Alliance and is increasingly utilising the new partnership with the MAT so that teachers and leaders can see and share good practice. You have also made sure that the school engages with local family support networks. It was pleasing to see during our tour of classes that this liaison with family learning includes weekly 'stay and play' sessions for two- and three-year-olds that is managed by local children's centres and family learning managers.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- there is a continued focus on raising standards in mathematics by improving pupils' mental and oral calculation skills by giving them more opportunities to apply their number skills to more varied and challenging problem-solving tasks
- making sure that the tasks provided in lessons enable pupils, particularly the most able, to apply more logical thinking rather than learning just through trial and error.

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

In addition to meeting with you, your deputy headteacher and two governors, I also spoke to another governor by telephone. You and I visited all classrooms and the early years with your deputy headteacher. I spoke to a number of parents at the start of the school day to seek their views of the school. I spoke to a number of pupils during lessons and looked at their work books. You and I, together with the deputy headteacher, met a group of pupils from Key Stage 2 to discuss their work, progress and views. I met with the chief executive and school improvement adviser from St Bart's MAT. I also considered the views of 28 parents and carers recorded on Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire. I looked at assessment information, and scrutinised and discussed with you and your deputy headteacher the school's self-evaluation and development plan. I checked staff vetting procedures to determine whether the school's arrangements for safeguarding are effective.