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Dear Mr George

Short inspection of Loughton School

Following my visit to the school on 15 March 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

Leaders have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection, while developing the school in a number of key areas. You have determinedly ensured that pupils flourish as a result of the good care and rich learning experiences that you and your staff provide. Your unstinting focus on improving the quality of the curriculum has ensured that pupils are developing deep knowledge and gaining skills across a wide range of subjects. Pupils and parents value these well-planned opportunities. The collaborative, creative ventures in which the whole school participates have helped to build a harmonious school community. One parent commented that teachers 'thought outside of the box' and the vast majority of pupils said that they would recommend the school to a friend.

You have developed your pupils' communication skills very well so they can confidently articulate the delight they feel at discovering a new fact or working out how different concepts are linked. This creates a positivity which is palpable throughout your school. You and your leaders systematically and efficaciously have ensured that all pupils are clear about their role in creating the right conditions for learning. You are explicit about what positive attitudes to learning look and feel like. For instance, every class starts a new school year with a programme of lessons entitled 'our amazing brains', in which pupils are taught positive learning behaviours. This is one of a number of ways in which you have ensured your school's values are fully realised in everyday practice.

You have successfully developed subject leaders' skills. They make a powerful contribution to improvements and guide teachers so that they know which tasks they should set in order to extend pupils' learning and thinking. Leaders wholeheartedly share the emphasis you have placed on enhancing pupils' interests and talents in the subjects they manage. However, you are rightly mindful that pupils' welfare is of paramount importance. To this end, you have successfully strengthened the care and support you provide for the pupils who struggle the most. Pupils in your school feel that they are challenged and cared for in equal measure, as do your staff. All of the staff who responded to the questionnaire said they enjoyed working at the school. Staff acknowledge that they have benefited professionally from the good opportunities you have provided for them to develop their practice.

Before the school's conversion to academy status, in the previous inspection report, leaders were asked to improve the quality of teaching. You have successfully achieved this.

- Teachers have improved opportunities for pupils to respond to written comments and learn from mistakes. This is evident from pupils' books in a range of subjects. However, you have sensibly extended this approach and fully integrated it into a wider focus on developing pupils' attitudes to learning. Learning from mistakes is part and parcel of your school's culture and used to good effect in the Year 3 'mathematics mastery' curriculum.
- You have introduced a new approach to assessment that teachers use well to plan activities that help all pupils to deepen their learning. This new approach enables teachers to identify the skills, knowledge and understanding pupils need to meet expected standards in core subjects. Consequently, teachers plan tasks that provide pupils with well-thought-through opportunities to demonstrate the extent and depth of their learning effectively. Teachers provide pupils with effective support where necessary, so they can complete tasks to the best of their abilities. For example, teachers supply pupils with practical equipment in mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your governors have established strong and effective safeguarding protocols and procedures which are properly implemented. You ensure all safeguarding requirements are fully met. Full and detailed checks are made when staff or volunteers are recruited. Your safeguarding leaders produce regular reports which are scrutinised by a named governor, who diligently monitors your work. Your leaders have trained your staff in how best to guide pupils so they stay safe online. You wisely include information, at the start of each academic year, on using the internet safely in the programme of lessons that you deliver on how to learn well. In keeping with the ethos of the school you focus on educating pupils comprehensively so they are informed enough to make sensible choices.

All the pupils I spoke to were very positive about the quality of care that adults provide; older pupils saw themselves as making a contribution to the caring ethos of your school. Your governors challenged you to develop further the care you give to those who struggle most. You have successfully done this by providing a bespoke space for additional support, called 'the sanctuary'. This space is accessible to pupils at break and lunchtime, in case they need to be away from the hustle and bustle. A small number of parents expressed concern about bullying in their comments on the online survey but, nevertheless, the vast majority agreed that their child felt safe at school. There are few recorded incidents of bullying. Pupils in their questionnaire feedback also indicated that bullying was infrequent and, in the small number of cases when it occurred, it was dealt with well by the staff.

Inspection findings

- You and the governors know the school very well. You have successfully used external sources, including educational consultants, to validate your judgements about the quality of teaching. Your judgements are accurate. The areas identified in your plans for further development are well focused. You sensibly recognise that the most-able pupils are not yet making the rapid progress of which they are capable in writing and have rightly made this a priority for the future.
- Subject leaders have made a strong and effective contribution to improving teaching, learning and assessment in the subjects they manage. The science subject leader has created a set of learning goals for science which focus on developing pupils' investigative skills. These are being well used to plan tasks that enable pupils to demonstrate that they can speculate about scientific processes. For example, Year 4 pupils created their own coastline to check out their theories about how erosion works.
- Governors have made a positive difference to the school. They use the detailed knowledge they have gained from their visits to the school, to challenge leaders to do better. For example, they asked the school to provide better support for pupils who struggle most, which the school has successfully done. Governors very closely monitor pupils' results. They have carefully scrutinised the results of pupils eligible for additional funding who have received tuition to check it is working well enough. On occasion, they have asked for changes in the way the school spends this funding so that it has greater impact, for example using it to develop teachers' capabilities.
- You are using a range of approaches to encourage pupils to develop their ideas in writing, including discussing controversial statements in small groups. In Year 5 classes, I saw that, on occasion, pupils' understanding was not being sufficiently extended because they were not provided with examples of effective writing. As a result, pupils who were capable of doing so were not given the chance to explore and then draw on some of the varied approaches that published writers use to engage readers in real texts. You have started to use the correct grammatical terms with pupils when you

discuss the impact of their word choices. This is not yet as developed as it could be given the high starting points of many pupils. Consequently, in 2015 key stage 2 examinations, pupils' progress in writing was slightly below that of pupils with similar starting points nationally. Some parents mentioned that, on occasion, teachers could make the work set for the most-able pupils more demanding. You agree that the teaching of writing has not been developed as fully as the teaching of mathematics.

- In 2015 examinations, most pupils' progress and achievement in reading was very strong. You are strengthening the way reading is taught by ensuring teachers set stretching tasks that pupils are required to complete independently. These tasks require pupils to find evidence from their books about characters' motivations and key themes. In 2015, middle-ability disadvantaged pupils' progress was not as strong as others nationally. The school's own assessments show that, following a greater focus on this group, gaps are now closing between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils currently in school.
- Your effective partnerships with a local secondary school which is a 'maths hub' and with an outstanding primary school have led to improvements in mathematics teaching. In Year 3, you have introduced a new 'mastery curriculum'. Pupils practise their key number facts thoroughly in every lesson and teachers provide pupils with concrete models to help them understand difficult concepts. Consequently, pupils are more confident when solving problems that require them to think hard. This is because they have the foundations very firmly in place and there are no gaps in their knowledge.
- You have developed the way teaching assistants are used across the school so they have more impact on pupils' progress. For example, in mathematics in Year 3, they work effectively with the whole class to identify pupils' mistakes while they work independently. This enables misconceptions to be eradicated before they can become fixed in pupils' minds.
- The learning development group has implemented an effective approach to improving teaching. Teachers work in groups of three, taking it in turns to observe each other and provide developmental feedback on the impact of the approaches used on pupils' learning. Teachers involved in this approach say that they have enhanced aspects of their practice. This is borne out by senior leaders' records which show that teaching has improved.
- Pupils behave very well. Incidents of poor behaviour are rare. This is because of the effective rewards and sanctions that are consistently used. Pupils are very well supported in making the right choices because they are taught about the impact that their poor behaviour can have on their learning. There are extensive opportunities for pupils to contribute to leading the school. Pupils therefore feel they play a key role in making the school a good place to learn.

- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability are making stronger progress now that you have developed the dedicated room where they receive additional help. Of note is the way teaching assistants effectively liaise with class teachers to ensure targeted pupils access the full range of subjects and are set tasks that are stretching enough. For example, when I visited the room, pupils with additional needs were using the style of graphic novels and comics to create stories about superheroes. Through carefully planned support, this approach was helping pupils to understand how stories are constructed.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. The annual drama production put on by each year group provides an excellent opportunity for pupils to enhance their social and creativity skills. Many of the plays have a strong moral or social message, which ties in well with the school's values. As a result of gaining confidence in performing, along with a passion for the theatre, your pupils performed 'Hamlet' in the School Shakespeare Festival. The school ensures that all pupils access the well-planned programme of visits and additional opportunities that memorably bring alive the topics they study, for example the 'fair trade fiesta'.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most-able pupils make the very rapid progress in writing of which they are capable.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner, and the director of children's services for Milton Keynes Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to discuss your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and priorities for further improvement. I observed guided reading with the assistant headteacher responsible for reading, observed writing and mathematics with you in Years 5 and 6 respectively, and observed a number of lessons with the deputy headteacher, including mathematics in Year 3, science in Year 5 and languages in Year 5. I spoke with parents in the playground at the end of the day, analysed 48 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and considered the 45 additional comments

made by parents. I analysed 56 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey, met with a group of pupils and talked with some during lessons. The 11 responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff were considered. I met with governors and spoke on the telephone with an independent consultant who reviewed the teaching in your school. A range of documents were scrutinised, including information about teaching and pupils' achievement, the school's self-evaluation summary and improvement planning, external reports on the school's performance, safeguarding checks and policies, and information on the school's website.