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Mrs Julie Petitt  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Petitt

### **Short inspection of Oaklands Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 27 September 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 September 2011.

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

Since your appointment to the post of headteacher in 2014, your determined leadership has restored the good quality of education in the school noted at the last inspection. Weaknesses in communication, between previous school leadership and the parent community, no longer exist. As a result, the partnership between all parents and the school is a significant strength and an outstanding feature of your work. This is an improvement on the findings of the previous inspection, which is endorsed by the extremely positive parental response on Ofsted's online questionnaire.

Roles and responsibilities are delegated effectively by you, to the deputy headteacher and middle leaders. Your expectations related to their performance are high. As a result, they play an important role in school improvement. The school improvement plan is used well to raise standards in English and mathematics. This is especially so in the quality of pupils' spelling, punctuation and writing.

Your strong and inclusive leadership has created a very positive climate for learning throughout the school. You have restored a high level of morale across the staff team. This was at an all-time low before your appointment. You set high expectations of staff and pupils alike. Pupils from all backgrounds are valued as individuals and encouraged to succeed. Relationships between pupils and staff are excellent.

Behaviour in lessons and around the school is very good. There is very little bullying and when it does occur it is dealt with promptly. Good attitudes and positive relationships are quickly established between the children in the Reception class. These positive characteristics are mirrored across all of the other classes throughout the school. The vast majority of pupils persevere with the tasks set for them in lessons. They take a pride in their work and this is reflected in the neat, cursive, handwriting in their books. Pupils relish the opportunity to participate in the wide range of extra-curricular activities available to them, such as cooking in the 'forest school' area, in residential trips to France and competitive matches against other schools.

The core British values of tolerance, respect and democracy are promoted effectively through a well-planned programme of assemblies. The pupils participate in raising money for international charities, such as that to purchase a boat for a village in the Philippines. This strengthens their cultural awareness and understanding of worldwide issues.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils fully meet statutory requirements. Records related to the vetting and recruitment of staff are thorough and compliant with statutory regulations. School leaders and governors ensure that rigorous procedures for the safety and well-being of all pupils are robustly applied. Concerns are followed up quickly and appropriate action is taken if required. Regular training, in the latest safeguarding requirements and government guidance, is given to all staff and governors; for example, training in e-safety and the government's 'Prevent' duty to counter radicalisation.

The headteacher, and other senior leaders with specific responsibility for child protection, work closely with staff from other agencies when any safeguarding concerns arise. Thorough records are kept related to child protection and care. The progress and well-being of the most vulnerable pupils are monitored very closely to ensure that their needs are fully met.

### **Inspection findings**

- Those with leadership responsibility regularly monitor lessons and scrutinise pupils' work to evaluate the impact of teaching and learning. Improvements in the teaching of writing are reflected in a trend of improvement in pupils' outcomes in English. For instance, the unconfirmed performance data related to the end of the 2016 key stage 2 national tests are above average in English and mathematics.
- Carefully targeted support for disadvantaged pupils (paid for using the additional government funding known as the pupil premium) is quickly reducing gaps in this group's achievement compared with other pupils nationally. The special educational needs coordinator monitors the progress of less able pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities regularly. She uses this information effectively to target support

to ensure that they make good progress in lessons. A review of assessment confirms that these pupils, and those from the local Traveller community, make good progress from their starting points.

- Improvements in the quality of pupils' writing are a direct result of the effective teaching of spelling, punctuation and grammar in specific lessons. A cursive handwriting style is taught well to all pupils in key stages 1 and 2. Pupils enjoy writing at length because they make few mistakes and are proud of their work. Teachers provide high-quality feedback to pupils to ensure that any mistakes are minimised in pupils' future work.
- Many opportunities are provided for all pupils to write at length in subjects in addition to literacy lessons; for instance, in their recording of investigations in science and topics in geography and history. Participation in national short story writing competitions provides further opportunities to write imaginatively. This is a significant improvement on the findings of the previous inspection.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good overall with examples of outstanding practice evident. Teachers plan work that is closely matched to the pupils' individual needs. Pupils are encouraged to choose tasks that provide them with sufficient challenge. This strategy works well for the most able pupils in most classes. Many of these pupils say that the tasks set for them are challenging and help them to make good progress. However, sometimes these pupils can become distracted if staff do not check on their learning often enough. As a consequence, their progress slows, as observed in a literacy lesson for younger pupils in key stage 2.
- Early literacy skills are taught successfully at an early age in the Reception class. For instance, children are encouraged to write simple three letter words and short sentences about a character named 'super potato'. The teaching of systematic synthetic phonics (the letter sounds that pupils need to know in order to read) in Reception and Year 1 is effective. Results in the latest Year 1 phonics screening test are above average. However, pupils of lower ability in Year 2 need extra support in using these sounds to read simple unfamiliar words in their reading books. They are not familiar with the use of non-fiction books to locate information. Most-able pupils in Year 6 are able to read fiction books with expression and fluency. However, their reading of stories from a wide range of authors is limited.
- Governors monitor the school's work regularly, through a carefully planned schedule of visits and activities linked to the current school improvement plan. This empowers them to ask challenging questions of school leaders based on a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They possess much relevant expertise, are well trained and are fully committed to overseeing the school's continued development for the benefit of the whole community.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching and learning is consistently good or better throughout the school
- older pupils, and especially the most able, have the opportunity to read and experience books from a wider range of authors to enrich and extend their learning further.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Philip Mann  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

From the pre-inspection review of published information, as well as the school's information online, inspectors chose to test the following lines of enquiry throughout the day.

- How effectively do leaders in the school use monitoring and self-evaluation to drive improvements?
- How effectively is the school narrowing gaps in achievement between different groups?
- How are skills in literacy, mathematics and computing being extended throughout the curriculum?
- How effectively do leaders promote British values, and extend pupils' understanding of religious and cultural identity within the local and wider community?
- Are all statutory procedures in place to ensure the safety of all pupils?

The inspector scrutinised a wide range of school documentation including that on the school's website. Together with the headteacher, the inspector observed teaching and learning in all classes. They also reviewed the quality of pupils' writing in several subjects in each of the classrooms. The inspector met with the headteacher to discuss school improvement and the safeguarding of pupils. Several pupils from Year 2 and Year 6 were listened to reading. Further meetings were held with the subject leader for English and with the special educational needs coordinator. The inspector also met with the chair of the governing body and four other governors, and a representative from the local authority. A thorough examination of the school's safeguarding arrangements was completed. The

inspector met with several parents at the school gate. The inspector took into account 109 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, 38 free text messages, and 13 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire. There were no responses to the online pupil survey.