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Susan Taylor
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Taylor

Short inspection of Links Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 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 June 2012.

This school continues to be good.

You and your leadership team have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. In recent times, a high number of teachers have moved on to other schools or retirement. This change in staffing has been managed well and has not impeded the school's focus on pupils' progress and attainment. The appointment of new staff, including the restructuring of the middle and senior leadership teams, has ensured that there is sufficient capacity to improve the quality of teaching further.

Your phased retirement during the coming academic year has been planned well with the governors. You are working part time and sharing the headteacher's role with your highly effective deputy headteacher, who is in charge on the days you are not working. This is providing effective continuity and consistency of leadership while a new headteacher is recruited.

The two areas for improvement from the previous inspection report have been tackled well. The school has remained focused on improving the quality of teaching and the role of phase leaders despite the significant changes in staff. As a result, the quality of teaching has retained many key consistent and effective features. These features contribute to pupils making the progress required over time. Nevertheless, you and your leadership team have recognised that pupils' progress could be even faster, especially in writing. As a consequence, secure plans are in place to increase the speed of progress, with a particular emphasis on the early years and key stage 1. These plans include using the most effective teachers to

coach and demonstrate good practice. In addition, phase leaders' monitoring of progress is being focused on the most able disadvantaged pupils.

Parents who responded to Parent View (the Ofsted online survey), and most of those I spoke to during the inspection, were positive about the school's welcoming atmosphere. They were particularly complimentary about how staff helped children to settle into their school lives, especially the early years team. A very small number of parents had some concerns about how the school communicated information about their children's progress. However, the majority were aware of, and pleased with, the recent 'parent mail' which they can access online.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and records are detailed and of high quality. All staff and governors are familiar with the recently updated government guidance for safeguarding. Training on being aware of the issues regarding female genital mutilation, child sexual exploitation and the 'Prevent' duty has taken place. Staff have a sound understanding of what to do if they have any concerns.

Pupils say that they feel safe in the school and staff are approachable and helpful.

Governors are aware of their responsibilities and safeguarding issues and the monitoring of the school's arrangements are recorded regularly at meetings.

Inspection findings

- Senior leaders have maintained a single-minded approach to raising standards, despite the challenges of a significant change in staffing. As a result, the number of pupils making at least expected progress, similar to other pupils' nationally, continues to improve since the last inspection.
- Governors are ambitious for the school. They have a good knowledge of what the school does well and hold leaders to account. Consequently, the headteacher, senior leaders and middle leaders regularly report on aspects of the school's performance, including the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.
- The recently appointed assistant headteachers and phase leaders are a cohesive and effective team. Their monitoring of the quality of teaching and working informally with teachers to improve practice has already started.
- Children in the early years have begun their school life well. They are already working on new letters and sounds in their phonics lessons. Social and physical routines are established. Parents who spoke to the inspector were pleased with the way the early years team had worked with them to help children settle in.
- By the time pupils leave key stage 2, their attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is in line with the national average. Their rates of progress from low starting points increase as they move through the school. However, pupils' progress in Reception and key stage 1, and in Years 3 and 4, could be even faster. The proportion of pupils who reach the nationally expected good level of

development at the end of Reception, and achieve the national expectations in the phonics checks are increasing significantly year on year. However, they are below the national average.

- Pupils who have special needs and/or disabilities are very well supported and are making good progress. The newly appointed special educational needs coordinator has made a good start. She is already developing positive working relationships with external agencies and other support staff. As a result, pupils are receiving well-timed and effective support where required.
- The distance between those pupils who are disadvantaged and supported by additional government funding known as pupil premium and other pupils has dramatically diminished over recent years. However, there is still a small distance to cover to be in line with those standards seen nationally, especially in writing.
- Pupils who read to the inspector were able to demonstrate confidence, fluency and an ability to work out difficult words and sounds.
- Classrooms and lessons are well organised. Given that the inspection was at the start of the academic year, pupils were on task and eager to learn. Pupils were confidently using practical resources to support calculations in mathematics. Teachers were using their good subject knowledge to question pupils.
- Senior leaders are aware that there are a few inconsistencies in the quality of teaching between a small number of classes. For example, pupils' progress is hindered by a few teachers wasting time by giving out resources. This leaves pupils waiting for too long for the materials they need to start their work. Also, in some classes, teaching assistants are not sufficiently involved in supporting pupils' learning throughout the entire lesson. As a result, pupils are not receiving the support they need to maximise their progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the rates of pupils' progress in early years and key stage 1 accelerates rapidly in order to meet nationally expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics
- teachers organise resources and materials in more efficient ways so that pupils can start their work more promptly
- teaching assistants are deployed to support pupils' learning throughout lessons.

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

Yours sincerely

John Seal
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The key lines of enquiry for this inspection focused on how well leaders and managers ensured that the school's checks and arrangements for safeguarding were in place; the progress of pupils in early years, key stage 1 and Years 3 and 4; the support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and how leaders and managers maintain good-quality teaching.

I met with you, your deputy and some of the middle leaders. I also held meetings with a group of staff, representatives of the governing body and the local authority. I listened to a group of pupils read. I spoke with many pupils during lessons and in the playground. I talked informally with a number of parents before school. I looked at information provided by the school, including the school's safeguarding records, policies and procedures and the single central record of recruitment checks. I looked at the school's assessment of its performance and information about pupils' progress. Lessons were visited in the early years, key stage 1 and Years 3 and 4. I took into account 22 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.