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Maureen Jones
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Jones

Short inspection of Penns Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 4 October 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

Leaders and governors demonstrate considerable drive and ambition. Penns Primary School has developed several key strengths, including ensuring that pupils are well-rounded citizens by the time they leave in Year 6. The ethos and culture of the school are impressive. You and your leaders are focused on ensuring that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment continues to improve.

The pupils that I spoke with during the inspection said that they enjoy learning. The whole school curriculum is exciting and full of practical and meaningful learning experiences. Together with the staff, you are committed to ensuring that pupils enjoy coming to school and make the most of every lesson.

Areas that were identified for improvement at the time of the last inspection have been addressed well, through the delivery and monitoring of well-thought-out action plans. For example, attainment and progress have risen year on year in mathematics as a result of high-quality staff training. Similarly, leaders have improved their effectiveness by ensuring that middle leaders have greater responsibility. Staff are given the freedom to develop their practice and take risks. One member of staff commented 'you are continually supported at Penns Primary, everyone looks out for one another and are on hand to help.'

You and your leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for development. You responded quickly to a decline in attainment in the Year 1 phonics check in 2015. As a result of your swift action, pupils make rapid progress and standards are now above national levels, with 93% of pupils reaching the expected standard in 2016. Nonetheless, these improvements are not yet substantially enough embedded and sustained over time in Year 1. High standards have been maintained across key stage 2. In key stage 1, however, progress rates are not as strong as those found in early years or key stage 2.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are understood by staff. Leaders keep detailed records of any concerns.

There is a clear focus on safeguarding at your school. Staff that I spoke with are clear about the actions they should take if they have a concern about a child. The school's single central record meets statutory requirements. Staff personnel files are also well organised and demonstrate your commitment to safer recruitment. References are obtained for prospective staff and interview questions explore the extent to which candidates have an understanding of how to keep children safe.

The school site is clean and well presented. Documents and risk assessments relating to the physical environment and maintenance of safety equipment are carefully organised and readily available. You and your team are rightly proud of the way the whole school site has been developed to help learning take place.

Inspection findings

- The teaching of phonics is now well organised and pupils make rapid progress. Teaching assistants are highly skilled at supporting pupils to catch up when they need to. I heard several pupils from Year 2 read, and found that they had developed their phonics skills further since undertaking the Year 1 screening check earlier in the year. The skills acquired by these pupils when they were in Year 1 are now embedded and are helping pupils to read with greater confidence and fluency.
- The school's own assessment information shows that rates of progress are not as substantial for some pupils in key stage 1 as those found in key stage 2. Observations of lessons in key stage 1 showed that there were opportunities for some pupils to receive an even greater level of challenge. Most-able pupils, in particular, were sometimes ready to move on to the next stage of their learning. The level of challenge needs to be developed further to help more pupils work at a greater depth by the time they leave Year 2.
- In key stage 2, pupils were observed being challenged effectively in subjects across the curriculum. In Year 4, pupils have recently used their imagination and creative skills to build 'dream jars'. The dream jars were inspired by an art installation in London which was established in the summer to celebrate Roald Dahl's 100th birthday. Pupils in Year 6 skilfully

used watercolours to paint in the style of Monet.

- I met with you and your leaders to scrutinise pupils' progress across the curriculum. Examples of pupils' work showed that pupils explore a wide range of topics and themes that help them secure good progress across the curriculum. Staff work hard to make learning as memorable as possible. For example, in the summer term, pupils are invited to plan a new topic for them to explore when they return from the summer holidays. This helps pupils manage the transition to different year groups and plants seeds of excitement and anticipation for the learning journey ahead.
- The school promotes fundamental British values well. British values are given much prominence within curriculum planning. Work in books and displays around the school evidence the extent to which pupils value those of different faiths and beliefs and understand the importance of democracy. Year 6 are currently learning about parliament and were preparing for a visit from the member of parliament for Sutton Coldfield.
- Improvements in attainment at key stage 2 in recent years compare favourably to national figures. Rates of progress in reading and mathematics are particularly strong. Although writing is also improving, this is an area that you, rightly, continue to focus on and have allocated further staff development to. Your improvement plans accurately identify the need for staff to further refine their assessment skills and moderate the judgements they arrive at, with colleagues in other schools locally. This training and moderation work is particularly focused on assessing the skills of the most able.
- Governors know the school well and understand your current priorities for development. In discussions about the school's next steps, governors were keen to discuss and clarify how they can challenge and support the school to secure further improvements. The governors' approach to the meetings I held with them demonstrates their ambition and tenacity.
- The vast majority of parents are happy with the school. One parent identified Penns Primary as a 'family' school. A few parents raised concerns about some aspects of your provision. Plans to take appropriate action in response to this parental feedback are in place.
- During the inspection, I observed pupils in a range of situations. They were polite, well mannered and keen to tell me about the clubs that they attend. For instance, a group of girls spoke to me with great enthusiasm about the school's cheerleading club. The pupils that I spoke to were also able to describe how they stay safe in the local community.
- Year 6 pupils recently visited an outdoor education centre. They recalled their adventures with excitement. One boy was thrilled to have had the opportunity to learn how to abseil. The children who attended the residential centre achieved an award that recognises the different outdoor activities they had participated in.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the best practice within the school continues to be shared, so that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is consistently strong across all phases, particularly in key stage 1
- pupils are sufficiently challenged in their learning, so that a higher proportion work at a greater depth by the time they move to key stage 2
- staff continue to refine their assessment of the standards attained by pupils in writing and have opportunities to moderate their judgements with colleagues beyond the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Keay
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with parents at both school gates and reviewed the communications that you had received from parents prior to the inspection. I scrutinised a range of documents relating to safeguarding, including the school's single central record, personnel files, child protection files, personal education plans for children looked after and health and safety audit material and risk assessments.

I met with you and your leaders to discuss your self-evaluation and we devised key lines of enquiry to focus inspection activities. We conducted a learning walk, taking in every class. We specifically focused on the impact of teaching on learning in key stage 1. I met with four governors, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body.

I spoke with your school's local authority adviser via the telephone. Responses from 32 pupils, 10 staff and 41 parents via Ofsted's online questionnaires were scrutinised following the inspection.