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Mrs Lisa Harper
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Dear Mrs Harper

Short inspection of Phoenix Infant and Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 7 December 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 November 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have a clear and accurate understanding of the school's areas for development and an appropriate plan to increase pupils' attainment. Your high expectations are shared by staff, governors and pupils.

You have created an atmosphere of purposeful learning around the school. Lively and vibrant displays capture pupils' imaginations and interests and contribute to the development of their numeracy and literacy skills. Pupils enjoy learning, behave well and make good progress.

You have maintained the significant strengths noted at the previous inspection. In particular, the quality of pastoral care remains strong. You have provided a safe and caring environment for pupils at the school. This is valued greatly by parents. All parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and free text service, and who spoke with me during the inspection were unanimously positive about the school. Parents appreciate your 'hands-on' approach and personalised support. One parent summarised the comments of many, describing the school as 'warm and inclusive'.

Leaders have dealt successfully with the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Up until 2015, pupils' attainment was consistently above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. You achieved this by introducing challenging targets for all pupils to reflect your high expectations for all. Leaders carefully track and monitor pupils' progress, including groups such as disadvantaged pupils, the most able pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Regular pupil progress meetings, involving leaders and teachers, identify any pupils who are not on track to make good progress from their starting points. You then put in place individual learning plans and additional support for these pupils. You make sure that this support is reviewed regularly, so that any interventions which are not enabling pupils to catch up are changed.

Last year, new national measures for judging pupils' achievement, which are not comparable with previous years, were introduced. Pupils' attainment in the school at the end of key stage 1 dipped below the national average in 2016. Leaders have continued to work with other schools and the local authority and have analysed the first year of national data, to gain a better understanding of the new measures and provide additional training for all staff. Staff are now clear about what pupils have to do to reach both the expected and the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics. Evidence seen on inspection, in lessons and in pupils' books, supports the school's current in-year information, which shows that the majority of pupils are currently on track to achieve at least in line with national expectations this year.

Leaders acted successfully on the recommendation from inspectors at the last inspection to improve children's attainment in writing to meet the national average at the end of the early years. You, rightly, made pupils' writing a whole-school priority. You introduced lots of adult-led writing opportunities to help children to develop their ideas, before putting them down on paper. For example, the early years classes talked about and created their own class story and then produced a giant storybook together. A 'writing wall' demonstrates pupils' progress in writing across the school, from early mark-making to using more sophisticated vocabulary and longer descriptions.

Pupils' attendance, although improving, has been below the national average for the past few years. This is mainly because some pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are persistently absent from school. You have taken action to improve this and, with the backing of the governing body, appointed a family support officer. The family support officer provides additional support to parents and pupils, as needed, to improve the pupils' attendance. Leaders have put in place more robust procedures to follow, when any pupil misses school too often. You have raised the profile of good attendance with parents and pupils and rewarded pupils whose attendance is high. Although the attendance figures are still below the national averages, the number of pupils who are persistently absent from school has reduced, and very few pupils are late to school in the mornings.

Safeguarding is effective.

You are the designated safeguarding leader and you are supported by another senior leader. You are both appropriately trained and keep your knowledge current through regular online updates. The governing body and the local authority complete annual audits to check that safeguarding arrangements continue to be robust. All statutory checks on staff are carried out and recorded carefully. You rightly make the safety of pupils your highest priority. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of a high quality.

You have checked that staff, including midday supervisors, have read and understood the latest government guidance. All staff know what to do, if they have any concerns. You showed me some examples of this in practice, where staff had acted swiftly and followed school procedures appropriately. You deal with all concerns promptly and are rigorous in following up any referrals to external agencies. You provide effective early help to parents and pupils, before problems escalate. You have also ensured that staff are trained in paediatric first aid and that there are appropriate pupil risk assessments in place for trips.

Pupils said they felt safe at the school because 'there is always a grown up to support you'. You have provided opportunities for pupils to learn about how to stay safe online and on the roads. You have explained, in language pupils can understand, potential dangers and how pupils can keep themselves safe.

Inspection findings

- You, the leadership team and governors have a clear and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. You recognise that further improvements are needed, so that more pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, achieve the higher standard in all subjects at the end of Year 2 and that persistent absenteeism is reduced, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The governing body provides you with effective support and challenge. It ensures that government funding is used to have a positive impact on pupils' progress and improves their attendance.
- The staff use high-quality assessment effectively, which underpins the school's work and is used well to plan learning that is appropriate for most pupils from their starting points.
- Teachers work with other schools and the local authority to check that their assessments of pupils' work are accurate. The teachers and the leaders now have a clear understanding of how well each pupil is doing and put in timely and personalised intervention when a pupil is falling behind.
- Pupils' books, including those of disadvantaged pupils, demonstrate the good progress, often from low starting points, which pupils make at the school.

- All teachers use the school's marking policy consistently. Pupils understand where they have made mistakes and what they need to do to improve.
- Leaders have rightly identified that more pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, need to reach the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1. Teachers now plan opportunities for the most able pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding. For example, in a mathematics lesson, the most able pupils were encouraged to cut out triangles, make them into different shapes and then explain their new properties.
- You are also expecting more pupils to reach the higher standard in all subjects by the end of Year 2.
- Your school development plan includes a focus on supporting boys' progress, as there is a much higher proportion of boys in the school than girls across all year groups. Teachers plan activities which engage boys' interests and, therefore, stimulate their learning. As a result, you have successfully reduced the difference between boys' and girls' attainment.
- Teaching assistants work closely with teachers and provide effective support for pupils in lessons. They ask pupils questions which develop the pupils' learning.
- Pupils work collaboratively together and support each other to make progress.
- Staff provide good support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders ensure that each pupil has an individual plan to support their learning and you also involve parents. Pupils make good progress from their starting points because of the effective support and good teaching that they receive.
- You have a consistent approach to teaching phonics. I heard pupils reading, using the techniques which the school has taught them to sound out difficult or unfamiliar words. Pupils also use their phonics skills to blend and spell words when writing.
- Leaders have used the pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils' attainment in reading, through one-to-one support and small-group support for phonics. The vast majority of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, pass the phonics screening test by the end of Year 2.
- You have successfully created a love of reading in pupils. All of the pupils with whom I spoke said that they enjoy reading and have a favourite book. Pupils found particularly motivating the possibility of being nominated to read to Storm the dog on his weekly visits to the school.
- You run a weekly book club for the most able pupils. This has developed pupils' enthusiasm and knowledge of books, particularly that of the most able disadvantaged pupils. Parents also commented on how they are encouraged to read with their children at home.
- Leaders have provided pupils with a broad and balanced curriculum, which develops the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural skills and prepares them well for junior school.
- Pupils have lots of opportunities to take part in art, drama, dance and music. During the inspection, I heard pupils enjoying their ukulele lessons. Following their recent Remembrance Sunday assembly, pupils reflected on what they had learned and subsequently wrote letters to express their feelings. One pupil wrote, 'the brave soldiers who died in the despicable war'.

- You have ensured that pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of fundamental British values and you also encourage their sense of responsibility through the Phoenix pupils' parliament. Pupils vote for their peers to represent them and elected pupils help leaders to improve the school. You organise regular visits into school from your local Member of Parliament for a question and answer session with pupils. This enables pupils to deepen their understanding of democracy.
- Leaders have ensured that the primary school physical education and sport premium funding is used effectively to promote pupils' engagement with sport. All pupils enjoy swimming lessons. In response to requests from parents, the school took part in the Robin Hood mini-marathon. You have also installed a 'trim trail' in the school grounds, which is used and enjoyed by parents and pupils and helps them to maintain healthy lifestyles.
- Pupils who begin school with little or no spoken or written English make good progress. This is because they are given effective support to develop the language skills they need to access learning.
- You use the opportunity provided by having pupils from diverse backgrounds to teach all pupils about different cultures and traditions. For example, one pupil produced a presentation for his class on France, his country of origin. Pupils are highly respectful and considerate of views different from their own.
- Parents comment on how well the school communicates with them and report that you deal with any queries quickly and efficiently.
- The school's website meets statutory requirements for published information.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, achieve the higher standard at the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics
- persistent absenteeism is reduced, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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

Yours sincerely

Sally Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with parents at the start of the day and met with you and three representatives from the governing body. I listened to pupils reading and spoke with a group of Year 2 pupils about their school experience. You and I visited all classes and examined pupils' workbooks. In addition, I scrutinised the school's safeguarding arrangements and records, including the single central register (the school's record of safeguarding recruitment checks on staff). I evaluated the school's documentation in relation to pupils' performance, improvement planning, attendance, and minutes of the governing body meetings. I took account of 24 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, the 20 responses to the Ofsted free text service and 12 responses to the staff survey. There were no responses from pupils to Ofsted's online survey.

This short inspection focused on:

- whether leaders had addressed the areas for improvement from the last inspection or not
- how leaders are responding to the dip in pupils' attainment at key stage 1 in 2016
- how leaders are tracking and monitoring groups of pupils to ensure that they all make good progress from their starting points
- the actions leaders are taking to reduce persistent absence for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/ or disabilities
- whether safeguarding was still effective across the school, or not, and that pupils are safe.