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Mr William Loughlin
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Loughlin

Short inspection of Cottesbrooke Infant and Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 1 February 2017, 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 predecessor school was judged to be good in January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school is an inclusive and positive learning community. As a result, pupils are enthusiastic and well-behaved learners. The staff value pupils' work and efforts and encourage pupils to succeed and enjoy school.

You and the deputy headteacher provide good leadership. Your school development plan identifies the right priorities for sustained improvement to teaching and pupils' achievement. You and your deputy headteacher are very skilled at monitoring and evaluating teaching accurately. You provide the right pointers for improvement when feeding back to teachers and support staff on their performance. Together with an effective governing body, you continue to recruit, develop, train and mentor a cohesive team of teachers and support staff who are committed to pupils' welfare and achievement. The large majority of parents who spoke with me or responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, are right when they say that yours is a good school.

Since the previous inspection of the predecessor school in 2013, you, the deputy headteacher and inclusion manager have maintained strong provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils with specific learning difficulties and those who have autism spectrum disorder achieve particularly well as a result of good teaching and support.

There is highly effective management and oversight of special educational needs provision. This is particularly important as you receive a higher than average proportion of pupils who have particular learning difficulties, including those who have autism spectrum disorder. In the 'Beehive', skilled support staff and teachers ensure that pupils with emotional or behavioural difficulties thrive in safe and stimulating learning areas. The reintegration of these pupils into their mainstream classes shows how skilful and effective the teaching and support are.

The school has also maintained good early years provision so that the large majority of children reach a good level of development. Most children in both the Nursery and Reception classes join with skills and abilities that are well below those typical for their age. Last year's outcomes show that most children left the early years having made good progress from their starting points; the current cohort is also making strong progress.

Since the removal of national curriculum levels, you and your leaders devised effective ways of tracking pupils' progress. Although the school has maintained good teaching since the previous inspection, there is still room for improvement. Last year's national tests were the first under these new arrangements and the results showed that some pupils should have done better as they fell short of age-related standards. Workbooks and observations of lessons show that the teaching in some lessons sometimes fails to provide the right level of challenge for pupils who are capable of reaching or exceeding age-related standards.

Disadvantaged pupils achieve well. This includes their achievement in phonics by the end of Years 1 and 2, and in reading, writing and mathematics across the school and early years. This is reflected in last year's assessments, which showed that disadvantaged pupils achieved as well as other pupils nationally. However, as with other pupils in the school, some Year 2 pupils who had previously reached a good level of development in the Reception Year fell short of the standards expected for their age. You and your leadership team are addressing this effectively by monitoring the impact of teaching on the progress made by pupils who have the potential to reach the standards expected for their age. Leaders and staff have devised effective interventions that help pupils catch up if they fall behind. For example, you have grouped pupils by ability across the Reception and Year 1 classes for phonics, and assessments show that this is having a very positive impact on raising standards. Other work is also improving pupils' development of early reading and spelling skills.

Pupils in the very early stages of learning to speak English achieve very well. Although many join at different times of the school year, they settle into school quickly. Good teaching and support help them to develop their conversational English quickly. This is reflected in the views of many parents who commented on the support the school provides. For example, one parent told me: 'My child now speaks better English and is reading by herself; I am so happy with this school.'

I spoke to many pupils in lessons and at breaktimes. They are happy to be in school and some told me that they like the company of their friends and look forward to playing and working together.

Some parents also told me how approachable the staff are. Some parents are concerned about playground collisions and accidents at breaktimes. As you know, I checked the incident logs and discussed the issue with leaders and supervisory staff. You and the deputy headteacher are investigating how to minimise the risks posed when pupils are running in the playground.

Although pupils enjoy coming to school, attendance is below the national average. You and your staff keep regular checks on the attendance of each class and there are some signs of improvement. Although there were too many instances of persistent absenteeism in the last academic year, leaders' positive relationships with families are now achieving real success. There is still scope to continue these efforts so that all families make sure that their children attend school regularly.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and robust. Staff recruitment, vetting and checking systems are rigorous. Teaching, support and administrative staff are well trained and vigilant. The large majority of parents that I spoke to and those responding by text message agreed that pupils are well cared for and safe in school.

The senior learning mentor and deputy headteacher keep meticulous records to follow up absenteeism and work closely with families to make sure that pupils are safe when not in school. The 'Early Bird' club is helping to reduce persistent absenteeism because it is a safe and stimulating start to the day. There are prompt referral procedures so that all staff are aware of whom to go to if they are concerned about a child's welfare. Risk assessments are carried out for playground activities and play areas in the early years. You and your staff team are, rightly, considering further ways to reduce accidents in the playground. You have introduced additional resources and play equipment to keep pupils active, healthy and safe outdoors.

Inspection findings

- Assessments show that many pupils that took the key stage 1 tests last year joined the school with skills and abilities well below those typical for their age. The cohort in Year 2 last year also included a significant proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. These characteristics contribute to the variations that exist in pupils' achievement each year and were reflected in last year's results.

- Current assessments show a marked improvement in standards compared with last year's results, particularly in pupils' reading and writing, and to a lesser extent in mathematics. Workbooks show that in some classes, pupils do not do enough additional activities in mathematics to deepen their understanding and extend their number and calculation skills. Leaders' development plans are, rightly, focusing on helping pupils apply their number skills to more challenging and varied mathematical problems.
- The curriculum and teaching make a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- A broad and interesting range of topics and programmes further enhances pupils' personal and academic development. After-school clubs and activities also help pupils to take an active interest in sports, games and stimulating academic and recreational activities.
- Information supplied by the school and work in pupils' books show that teaching is helping pupils to make good progress in relation to their starting points. The staff are successful in encouraging pupils to apply core literacy and number skills to other subjects, such as science, religious education and humanities.
- Pupils' writing is improving well because you and your staff have focused on developing pupils' spelling and handwriting. The introduction of printed 'tramlines' in workbooks to guide pupils' handwriting is improving the accuracy, form and structure of their writing. This includes boys' writing where past assessments show that they typically do less well than girls.
- Leaders have also adapted guided reading lessons so they focus more on helping pupils to comprehend what they read. This is extending pupils' vocabulary and improving their confidence and fluency when reading aloud or independently.
- Reading and writing standards are improving and the difference in achievement between boys and girls is reducing. However, there is still more to be done to ensure that all pupils who reached a good level of development in the early years also go on to reach or exceed the standards expected for their age by the end of Year 2.
- You and your staff reward good attendance by reporting back during assemblies, and through bold displays celebrating how well some classes are improving. These efforts need to continue.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to focus on improving teaching so that, in all lessons, teachers set work that presents pupils with a sufficient level of challenge to extend their learning and deepen their understanding

- build on the good outcomes in the early years by making sure that all of the children who achieve a good level of development at the end of Reception Year go on to reach or exceed age-related standards in reading, writing and, particularly, in mathematics, by the end of Year 2
- build on the strong relationships established with parents, carers and families to further reduce persistent absenteeism.

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

Charalambos Loizou
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the inclusion manager and two members of staff with management responsibilities. I also spoke to two governors by telephone, including the chair of the governing body. We visited classes together to observe some teaching, looked at pupils' work in books and spoke to pupils during lessons. I also spoke to pupils during breaktime and looked at behaviour and incident logs. I spoke to some parents at the start of the school day and considered the 56 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. I also analysed the 50 responses from parents who commented by text to Ofsted's regional office.

I met with the senior learning mentor who works with families and, together with the deputy headteacher, monitors pupils' attendance and absenteeism. I scrutinised the school's development plan and discussed with you and the deputy headteacher how you and your leadership team check the quality and effectiveness of teaching across the school. You shared with me the most recent assessments of pupils' attainment and progress and we discussed the national test results and assessments undertaken by pupils in 2016. I considered the 37 responses from staff to the inspection survey and the views expressed by some in writing about their roles and professional development. I checked staff vetting and safeguarding procedures to determine whether the school's arrangements for safeguarding are effective.