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Mrs Patricia Vladev
Headteacher
Stanstead Nursery and Primary School
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Dear Mrs Patricia Vladev

Short inspection of Stanstead Nursery and Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 1 March 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 school was judged to be good in March 2013.

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 established a well-maintained and resourced school which provides an attractive learning environment for pupils. During our tour of the school, it was clear to see that the pervading atmosphere is calm, happy and busy. Your vision statement, 'Children come first,' is apparent throughout the school and pupils speak warmly about the care they receive, saying it is like a 'supernova that spreads to all the children'. Staff say that they feel valued and happy and many parents speak very positively about their children's happiness and the information they receive.

Your self-evaluation summary is clear and concise and you have correctly identified the school's key strengths and areas for improvement. The school development plan and the associated subject action plans are aligned closely to the self-evaluation summary and together they point to a school that has an ambitious vision for its pupils.

As an experienced and effective headteacher, you have made some astute appointments in order to establish a strong leadership team with a shared and enthusiastic vision for the school. Together, under your determined leadership, they express a decisive grasp of the current areas for improvement and so there is good capacity for continued success.

In response to recommendations from the last inspection, you have provided thorough training for subject leaders, using expertise from the local authority. Leaders now have opportunities to take part in a variety of monitoring and school improvement activities. They have built up a strong and cohesive set of skills. Therefore, distributed leadership is now a strength of the school.

You have carefully analysed the figures relating to pupils' outcomes in 2016. In the light of your analysis, you have taken decisive action to focus primarily on the key area of reading, while also aiming to increase the proportion of pupils achieving at greater depth in English and mathematics.

As a result of the improvement measures you have put in place, current assessments show that pupils in all year groups are back on track to make good progress in reading this year.

The impact of the strong focus on challenging the most able pupils is also very evident across the school. This positive impact can be seen in pupils' books, through the high standards they are currently achieving and through the obvious pride they take in their work. This applies equally to the work and attitudes of disadvantaged pupils. In lessons observed, pupils spoke very enthusiastically about your 'achieve and aspire' target-setting system. One pupil readily commented, 'I like to push myself to solve a problem'.

The training which has been provided for teaching assistants is having a positive impact on learning and progress. In a number of classes, teaching assistants were observed to be confidently and skilfully leading small groups of the most able pupils in English and mathematics, as well as leading reading interventions.

The full impact of these improvement activities is yet to be measured through the end-of-year outcomes. The focus on reading and on challenging the most able must continue.

Leaders and governors are aware that the school's absence and persistent absence figures over time have been above national percentages. These absence figures have steadily improved over the past three years but they remained above national figures in 2016. Encouragingly, there appears to be further improvement, as seen in current figures this year to date.

However, there is still more work to do in order to bring overall attendance up to national levels and to reduce the high number of persistent absences. The school must continue its work in this regard, especially for its most vulnerable pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

All policies and procedures are fully compliant with regulations. You have made sure that staff checks are scrupulous; training for staff and governors is up to date and carefully documented. You keep well-organised behaviour, bullying and child protection records and it is clear to see that all concerns are reported by staff in a timely manner and are followed through to referral beyond the school where necessary.

A strong culture of watchful care runs through all of the school's safeguarding work. The school site is secure and pupils state very strongly that they feel safe at all times. They are very clear about how to keep themselves safe from bullying in all its forms and describe how staff handle any issues that do arise quickly and fairly. Pupils speak very warmly about the quality of care they receive. They have a high level of confidence in the ability of staff to support them if they are 'feeling down', describing this as being 'engulfed in kindness'.

Pupils also appreciate the pupil-led 'happy gang' at playtimes, the member of staff whom they call their 'safety guard' and the provision of a 'bubble box' into which they can post notes requesting support.

During our tour of the school, I observed a number of occasions where vulnerable pupils were being supported discreetly, without fuss, in order to keep them calm and focused on learning.

Inspection findings

- In 2016, pupils' outcomes showed weaknesses in reading and in the proportion of pupils achieving at greater depth in English and mathematics. You have worked with other leaders to analyse this issue and have responded swiftly by introducing a number of changes. You have used part of your pupil premium funding to introduce an individualised reading intervention programme which is delivered across the school for the first 15 minutes of each day. Pupils and parents spoke enthusiastically about this programme and other 'booster' activities that pupils receive.
- Teachers in key stage 1 group pupils by ability for the daily phonics lessons, ensuring that each group receives the appropriate level of challenge. For example, pupils in the most able group were using mnemonics and rhymes to help them spell tricky words such as 'injection'. Within the ability groups, teaching assistants are deployed effectively to support individuals and small groups to improve their phonic skills.
- The school library is an inviting space with well-organised, high-quality resources. It is accessed formally, for class sessions, and also informally, by individuals, for topic-based research and simple reading for pleasure.

- Children in the early years have many opportunities to develop their skills through an impressive range of indoor and outdoor activities in this well-managed and exceptionally well-resourced area of the school. The staff are very aware of children's abilities and carefully target the daily activities to encourage early reading and to challenge the most able.
- You have put a range of measures in place to address the school's issue of poor attendance. There is a thorough 'Attendance and late policy' available on the school's website. This policy sends a clear message to parents regarding the importance of school attendance and the simple steps to follow in the case of absence. You have robust systems in place to analyse absences and also to track the whereabouts of pupils taken off roll. You work effectively with families to support good attendance, for example through the deployment of a family support worker and also by engaging with external agencies such as the education welfare service. Alongside this, you and your staff work directly with pupils through a reward system for celebrating good attendance, to promote good habits and reduce absences.
- You meet regularly with the experienced and knowledgeable chair of governors, working closely together to monitor standards and oversee strategic responsibilities. Governors fulfil their statutory duties effectively and have undergone all of the appropriate training, including that relating to safeguarding. They have a sound overview of the school's work and do not shy away from challenging leaders on the school's performance. They are rightly focused on pupils' well-being and progress. As a result of these concerted efforts, the school remains securely good.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the recent dip in reading outcomes is reversed and the most able pupils continue to be challenged and inspired so that a greater proportion go on to achieve at greater depth in English and mathematics across the school
- rates of absence and persistent absence continue to improve so that they are consistently below national figures, especially in regard to the most vulnerable pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Watkins
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and the senior leadership team. I met with groups of pupils and a representative from the local authority. I held a telephone conversation with the chair of governors. I listened to pupils read and looked at samples of pupils' written work. We conducted a tour of the school together and visited many lessons and activities. I observed pupils' behaviour around school, in lessons and at lunchtime. I met a number of parents informally at the beginning of the school day and considered the views of parents expressed in 33 responses posted on Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I spoke with a range of staff and considered the views expressed in five responses to the online staff survey. I evaluated a wide range of documents, including minutes of governing body meetings and safeguarding documentation.