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Mrs Francesca Gallagher
Headteacher
Swing Gate Infant School and Nursery
Swing Gate Lane
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Dear Mrs Gallagher

Short inspection of Swing Gate Infant School and Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in May 2012.

This school continues to be good.

Working closely with your leadership team, you have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Swing Gate Infant School and Nursery has retained the positive ethos identified at the previous inspection in which pupils develop strong academic and social skills. Parents value the support and care that staff provide for pupils at the school. This is evident in the many statements made in Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Parents commented on the 'amazing teachers', the 'caring and kind environment' and the 'excellent communication between staff and parents'. One parent stated that this was 'the kind of school that you'd hope for your children as their first experience of formal education'.

Although both you and the deputy headteacher are relatively new to the school, you have made rapid progress in improving the school. You are determined that the school will eventually be judged to be outstanding. You have ensured that the priorities identified in the school's improvement plan are being effectively addressed. A particular strength of your work is the focus you are giving to developing the social and emotional health of pupils so they are free to concentrate on their learning. You are developing a good understanding of the barriers some pupils face to being successful in their learning and are working with staff to make sure these pupils receive the support they need.

Governance at Swing Gate is strong. The effectively led governing body provides both challenge and support in equal measure. Governors are ambitious for pupils'

academic success as well as their health and well-being. They are regular visitors to your school. Their visits are clearly defined to support the priorities identified in the school development plan. Their reports both challenge and commend your work on leading improvements in the school.

Pupils have exemplary behaviour. They are kind, thoughtful and empathetic to each other's needs. Pupils want to learn and are supportive of each other in lessons. In lessons, pupils are both diligent in their approach to completing learning tasks and excited to gain new skills, knowledge and understanding. You have ensured that pupils have access to a well-balanced curriculum, including opportunities to learn about life in Victorian Britain, other faiths and cultures and British cultural monuments. Many pupils attend a range of extra-curricular clubs and activities which they speak enthusiastically about, for example 'girls and boys play football together, and it's great'.

You correctly judge the provision in the early years to be a strength of the school. Strong leadership has ensured that children make a good start to their learning in both the Nursery and Reception classes. The staff have high expectations of children which they strive to meet. Teachers and teaching assistants provide very effective support to all children, ensuring that they make rapid progress. As a result, children in Nursery and Reception develop their communication skills very well. Through well-structured support, children also develop their phonics and mathematics skills, ensuring that they are well prepared for learning in Year 1.

You and your leadership team take effective action when you consider that improvements are required. For example, you have introduced strategies to accelerate pupils' reading skills. You have plans in place to further develop middle leadership within the school to ensure that standards are robustly met in every area of the curriculum.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, ensure that safeguarding procedures at the school are rigorously implemented. Records are diligently maintained and reviewed regularly to ensure the safety of all pupils. Leaders are tenacious in ensuring the physical and emotional well-being of all pupils. Staff receive regular training in safeguarding and know what to do to ensure the well-being of pupils.

Staff ensure the safety of pupils through effective school procedures. One pupil told me that the school made her feel 'super safe'. The pupils that I spoke to are acutely aware of how to keep themselves safe online. They also understand the importance of telling an adult when they have a problem. All parents who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their children are safe and that staff 'genuinely care about the children's welfare'.

Pupils that I spoke to understand the definition of bullying. They explained that bullying is not common and that were it to happen, they are confident that staff would respond very quickly. Leaders have embedded strategies to promote

positive relationships among pupils and to ensure that any incidents are dealt with appropriately and in a timely fashion.

Inspection findings

- A key line of enquiry was the low attendance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. It was lower than that of pupils nationally in 2016. Persistent absence for these groups was also high. You have recognised the importance of monitoring and evaluating the attendance of these groups. You have focused on ensuring that parents and pupils value the importance of regular attendance at school through social events and school-based incentives. It is too early to measure the impact of these strategies.
- I also considered the progress of pupils who find reading difficult, including disadvantaged pupils, in key stage 1. Although the number of these pupils is relatively low, they did not make good enough progress in reading by the end of Year 2. You have identified the barriers that these pupils encounter and have embedded a range of strategies to improve their achievement. For example, additional adults provide tailored support that is personalised to the needs of each pupil.
- Teachers ensure that pupils of all abilities are provided with the necessary academic and pastoral support to help them make effective progress. However, some teachers do not give good enough feedback because they do not adhere to school policy. As a result, some pupils do not make accelerated progress.
- I also considered the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the early years. Children in both Nursery and Reception are very well supported to develop their language skills, which effectively supports their mathematics, reading and writing skills. The children develop good learning behaviours. One child told me that 'you have to be brave or ask a buddy' to help you learn independently.
- Leadership of reading, writing and mathematics is effective. Middle leadership of some other subjects is less effective. In subjects where this is the case, lessons tend to concentrate on the knowledge-based aspects of the subject at the expense of the skill development necessary. It is too soon to measure the impact of the plans you have to improve middle leadership.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and of those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities continues to improve so that it is at least in line with the national average
- the strategies in place to improve the reading achievement of pupils working at below age-related expectations are rigorously pursued so that all pupils achieve as well as they can

- all middle leaders are equally effective at improving teaching and raising standards within their subjects
- all teachers fully implement the school policy for providing feedback to pupils about their work.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Aykin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During the course of this inspection I held meetings with you, other senior and middle leaders and a group of three governors, including the chair of the governing body.
- I spoke with pupils informally in classrooms and when walking around the school site. I also met with a group of 13 pupils.
- During two tours of the school with you, I visited each class and observed pupils at work.
- I undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work in their books and folders.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined along with the school's record of checks carried out on staff working at the school.
- A range of documents were analysed or discussed, including: the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans; documents relating to pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour; minutes of governor meetings; and curriculum plans.
- I considered the views of 63 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the views parents expressed via free text.