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Mrs Karen Williamson-Smith  
Headteacher  
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Staffordshire  
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Dear Mrs Williamson-Smith

### **Short inspection of Pirehill First School**

Following my visit to the school on 26 April 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 school was judged to be good in March 2012.

### **This school continues to be good.**

You have maintained the good quality of education identified at the previous inspection. With the support of the deputy head, other staff and governors you have successfully built upon the strengths identified at the time of the last inspection and have also improved other aspects of the school, which is why parents are so enthusiastic about the quality of education that their children receive.

You bring a calm, strategic and confident approach to your work, which parents, staff and governors recognise and appreciate. Parents who I spoke to informally at the start of the day were full of praise for the school. This praise is reflected in the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Typical comments included statements such as, 'This is a fantastic school, the staff go above and beyond to help families,' and, 'Pirehill provides our children with an interesting, fun and safe environment in which to learn.'

Staff morale is high and they appreciate the training you offer. This training continues to improve the consistency of teaching quality across the school as it is tailored to meet the needs of individual staff as well as focusing on whole-school improvements. Teaching assistants are included in whole-school training and receive training in specialised areas, such as supporting pupils with speech and language difficulties or dyslexia. This means they are highly effective in helping pupils in class and in small groups.

You are ably supported by senior leaders and a suitably qualified governing body. Governors monitor the work of the school via detailed reports and visits to see the school at work. They ask probing questions and provide leaders with a good balance of support and challenge.

At your previous inspection, in March 2012, you were asked to improve the progress made by the most able pupils. Since then, the progress made by this group has compared favourably with pupils from similar starting points nationally. In July 2016, the key stage 1 results were again strong in reading and writing for this group but weaker in mathematics. You responded swiftly to these results by increasing the level of challenge for the most able pupils and this has had a clear impact. However, more needs to be done to ensure that pupils with middle prior attainment make consistently strong progress in writing and mathematics.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well catered for through a good quality curriculum. The plethora of pupils' high-quality work displayed around the school celebrates their successes in a range of subjects. Pupils speak enthusiastically about the leadership opportunities available to them such as becoming play leaders, eco-warriors, office helpers, house captains and members of the school council. Through these posts of responsibility pupils are learning to work independently, to take responsibility and the importance of good organisation and as a result gain confidence. Pupils enjoy weekly opportunities to discuss current affairs and relate them to British values. They also enjoy the wealth of extra-curricular opportunities that include running the daily mile, learning to play the violin, singing in the choir, plus taking part in a bloggers' club and a 'knit and natter' club.

Pupils behave exceptionally well in lessons and around the school, showing respect and courtesy to staff and visitors and concentrating hard when they are working. Pupils enjoy their lessons because teachers make learning interesting and ensure that pupils understand how to succeed in their work. The vast majority of pupils attend school regularly and arrive punctually and eager to start their day.

Children in the early years get off to a very good start to their education. Children learn in a safe and supportive environment where learning activities are well matched to their needs. The most able children are sufficiently challenged and I saw some children producing excellent written work about the Gingerbread Man. The outdoor environment is also used very effectively to promote opportunities for children to write and explore number. Children of all abilities make good progress from their starting points and the proportion of children reaching a good level of development remains well above average.

Pupils achieve well over time in the phonics check in Year 1, which has been well above the national figure for the last three years.

The special educational needs coordinator ensures that pupils with additional needs

are very well supported. Consequently, all children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are currently achieving well. Excellent links exist with a very wide range of external agencies and the school's special needs provision is highly regarded by the local authority.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

There is a strong culture of safeguarding at the school. As the designated safeguarding lead, you ensure that all staff receive regular training around all aspects of child protection. Staff have the skills needed to identify potential signs of harm, abuse or extremism. Safeguarding is a regular feature of staff meetings and you ensure that you update staff when there are changes in government advice. All the required safeguarding checks are in place and child protection records are meticulous, securely maintained and well organised. All staff are vigilant in spotting concerns and these are reported immediately, actioned promptly and followed up tenaciously. Checks on the suitability of staff to work with pupils are rigorous.

Governors attend relevant training and fully understand their role in ensuring that appropriate safeguards are in place to protect children.

The pupils that I met during the inspection all told me they felt safe in the school and that they can talk to adults if they have any concerns. Pupils understand the difference between falling out and bullying and are confident that should bullying occur staff will take the appropriate action. There is a well-planned curriculum to support pupils in knowing how to be safe, which includes understanding the potential dangers of using the internet. This understanding is enhanced by Year 3 and 4 'E-cadets' who provide their peers with advice on how to stay safe online.

Parents' views are equally positive. An overwhelming majority agree that pupils are safe and well cared for at Pirehill First School.

### **Inspection findings**

- You and your governors correctly identified that in 2016 Year 2 pupils did not make the same rates of progress as similar pupils nationally in writing and mathematics, particularly those with middle prior attainment. You have resolutely sought to resolve these weaknesses through a combination of actions that include rigorous checking of the quality of teaching and learning; more focused assessment; providing additional support for those pupils falling behind; and providing more support for staff to develop their confidence and skills.
- Leaders' actions to improve the teaching of writing are making a discernible difference. The progress made by middle-attaining pupils is now closely monitored and a wealth of interventions are introduced if pupils' progress slows. Teachers have a much better understanding of the expected standard in writing and they work alongside other local schools to moderate pupils' work. This has helped raise expectations and ensure that all pupils are suitably challenged.
- In mathematics, all teachers have benefitted from high-quality professional development and a new approach to the teaching of number has enhanced

pupils' love of the subject. As a consequence, middle-attaining pupils are now making stronger progress from their key stage 1 starting points. Nevertheless, you know that there is still work to be done in ensuring that the excellent start pupils enjoy in the early years is fully capitalised on so that middle prior-attaining pupils achieve outcomes in writing and mathematics that are at least in line with similar pupils nationally by the end of key stage 1.

- The governing body regularly review the impact the pupil premium is having on the progress of disadvantaged pupils and adjust the areas where it is spent accordingly. Leaders recognise the need to support the most able disadvantaged pupils and their efforts are beginning to bear fruit, as evidenced by the work in pupils' books. Intervention plans are in place to support a number of pupils in this group. However, leaders need to rigorously monitor the progress made by disadvantaged pupils in all year groups to ensure that their attainment is closer to that of others nationally.
- Teaching in Years 3 and 4 is typically characterised by high expectations, strong relationships with pupils and happy, productive classroom environments. Teachers were observed using effective questioning to check pupils' understanding and shape the ongoing level of support needed. Teaching assistants are also highly skilled and intervene in a timely manner to accelerate learning. Current teaching is accurately matched to pupils' needs and the school's tracking data and pupils' work indicates that all groups of pupils are making good progress.
- The school is vigilant in monitoring pupils' absence and has been successful in improving the overall level of attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils enjoy the wealth of incentives and rewards that encourage high levels of attendance, including the bronze, silver and gold certificates distributed at the end of each term. However, further work needs to be done to ensure that the attendance of disadvantaged pupils continues to improve.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the progress of the small number of disadvantaged pupils in the school is accelerated so the difference in attainment between these and other pupils in the school continues to close
- further steps are taken to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils who do not attend school regularly enough
- the progress of middle prior-attaining children in writing and mathematics is accelerated so they attain at least in line with similar pupils nationally by the end of key stage 1.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will

be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alan Prince  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this one-day inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you, senior leaders, a group of teachers, support staff and the chair of the governing body. I also had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. You and I visited all classes to look at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and conducted two dual lesson observations. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school, during lessons, and at playtime. I talked to members of the school council and spoke with pupils about their learning during lessons. I looked at samples of pupils' work in different year groups. I also looked at a number of documents, including information about pupils' progress, your school self-evaluation, pupil premium reports, the school improvement plan, minutes of governor meetings, documents relating to safeguarding, the latest attendance figures and information posted on the school's website. I considered the views of 65 parents who replied to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, which included 32 free text responses. I also looked at the school's own surveys of parents.