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Miss Rosemary Godwin
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Dear Miss Godwin

Short inspection of Stanbridge Lower School

Following my visit to the school on 16 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 April 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Stanbridge Lower is an inclusive school where children and pupils thrive in the nurturing, happy and safe atmosphere. You, your governors and your staff are committed and passionate about ensuring that pupils achieve well, and develop into well-rounded young people. You have created a culture where all pupils are at the heart of everything you do. You are relentless in ensuring that pupils are well cared for and valued as individuals. You inspire staff, pupils and parents to work collaboratively. Only the very best will do for pupils at Stanbridge Lower School. Governors and staff all share this aspiration.

Pupils enjoy being among their friends and sharing different experiences with each other. For example, in the whole-school assembly, pupils celebrated their work and confidently discussed the things that were special to them in their life. Pupils describe their school experience as 'epic,' 'awesome,' 'exciting' and 'just perfect!' Pupils say they love coming to school. One pupil said, 'I wake up thinking, what exciting things am I going to be doing at school today. If I cannot be in school I feel sad and look forward to getting back to my friends.'

A focus on this inspection was looking at the context of your school in relation to the progress pupils make from their starting points. Although published information

suggests that your pupils do not achieve well, this does not present an accurate picture of achievement in the school. The biggest issue for you is that you continually face significant challenges in securing consistently good attainment for pupils, in comparison to the national averages. This is because there are huge variations, on a daily basis, in pupil cohorts, and their attendance levels. Owing to these challenges, you ensure that your monitoring systems for pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics are rigorous and the planning of teaching takes into account the provision pupils require during, and after, periods of extended absence. Inspection evidence, and your current assessment information, shows that the actual progress all pupils make from where they start is good. Children in the Reception class are making good progress from their starting points and a higher proportion are on track to achieve a good level of development at the end of this year than was the case previously. You also clearly demonstrate that, for pupils who are in school on a regular basis, their attainment is similar to, or above, their peers nationally in reading, writing and mathematics.

Members of your governing body are very committed to their roles, and have a very thorough understanding of the context, strengths and areas for improvement in the school's provision. They provide a measured mix of rigorous challenge and support, and are increasingly confident in their strategic roles. Governors relentlessly focus on the attainment of all pupils. However, you rightly acknowledge that, while an eye should be kept on the attainment of all pupils, the focus on challenging pupils' progress will give a fairer, more accurate, indication of the school's performance.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school's work. They believe the school does a great job and think their children are lucky to attend a school that is so well led. One parent summarised the views of many when saying, 'Stanbridge is a fantastic school. My children have been lucky enough to attend and benefit from the caring, nurturing environment that Stanbridge offers. All staff members are a credit to the school and I wouldn't hesitate to recommend them to anyone. Children excel and obtain the best start to their education, thanks to being pupils here.'

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

A strong culture of safeguarding has been developed at the school. You possess a very good knowledge of those pupils in your care whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable. All staff demonstrate that they know the needs of pupils and their families well. They are vigilant in identifying any evidence that a child may not be doing as well as they could. They swiftly pick up on this and proactively intervene. This ensures that all children and pupils are well cared for and safe.

All appropriate and relevant checks are made on the suitability of adults working at the school. Concerns over pupils' welfare are managed quickly and meticulously. Your record keeping is precise and very clear about what actions and monitoring are required to keep pupils free from any harm.

Pupils have a very sound knowledge and understanding of how to stay safe. They can explain how to use the internet responsibly. They also know that any adult at the school will be able to help them if they are worried or have any concerns. Pupils think that, in their lessons, they learn a lot about taking care of themselves, both in school and when out and about.

Behaviour at the school is good. There is little disruption to learning, and pupils try hard to do their best. Pupils explained that they independently use the classroom 'thinking spaces' to make sure they have time to get ready for their work when they need to. Pupils added that, if there are any problems, they are dealt with very quickly and fairly.

Staff and governors receive regular up-to-date training on all safeguarding issues and national changes. They take their safeguarding roles very seriously and know the priority is the care and well-being of all pupils. Governors check your work regularly and you seek further external checks to ensure that you are doing the best job you can. As a result, safeguarding and the care of pupils at Stanbridge are effective, and strengths of the school.

Pupils say they feel very safe and well supported in school. Parents wholeheartedly agree with this. 'As parents it is important for us that our children are safe and happy. Nothing is too much trouble and they care for our children as if they were their own.'

Inspection findings

- You were tasked in the previous inspection with improving pupils' achievement in mathematics, by providing pupils with more opportunities to carry out practical tasks and problem-solving, particularly linked to real-life experiences.
- Pupils are able to use practical equipment to help them learn on a regular basis, and activities are set up to ensure that pupils independently access resources. For example, in the Reception class, a child used a 'hundred square' accurately to show an adult they could count in 5s. The proportion of pupils in key stage 1 that are on track to reach age-related expectations for mathematics is better than the previous two years. This reflects an improving trend in pupils' achievement.
- An additional aspect to improve from the previous inspection was to increase the amount of outstanding teaching and learning. Teaching is a core strength of the school. Staff use their thorough subject knowledge, high-quality questioning, and a consistent use of classroom routines effectively to ensure that pupils sustain concentration, cooperate effectively, and learn well. The strength of the teaching team is how they expertly tailor teaching and learning to the needs of individuals, and how this is flexible to reflect the transience of the attendance of a large majority of pupils.
- Another line of enquiry during this inspection was to check that leaders and governors ensure that the additional government funding to support

disadvantaged pupils is being used wisely, to secure better outcomes for this larger than average group of pupils.

- Both you and the governors are very aware of the needs of your pupils. Many of your disadvantaged pupils also have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You fund the family support worker, who works tirelessly to support vulnerable families and offers parents and pupils invaluable support. You also work closely and effectively with external agencies. Most noteworthy, for example, is your work with the locality access and inclusion team. Consequently, when your disadvantaged pupils are in school, they make good progress from their starting points and, over time, their attainment is improving.
- A further line of enquiry considered how effective the teaching of phonics is. This is because the proportion of Year 1 pupils who reach the expected standard in the phonics screening check, though improving, has been consistently below the national average.
- The work of your new English leader on developing phonics teaching across the school is leading to a rising number of Year 1 pupils currently on track to achieve the expected standard this year. For example, you have reorganised the timings of phonics teaching so that children and pupils can practice their phonics more regularly throughout the day, and have more opportunities to use this in all of their work. Pupils sound out unfamiliar words, and demonstrate good levels of fluency and understanding. Pupils enjoy reading, or listening to an adult read, both in school and at home.
- The final line of enquiry focused on how the school manages pupils' attendance and reduces persistent absence. You demonstrate that this is a daily focus for you. You are consistently instigating a number of strategies to improve attendance, and these are always very much dependent upon individual family need. The family support worker contributes significantly to the work you do with families. This results in positive, honest relationships with families based on mutual trust, loyalty and respect.
- Despite your relentless efforts, absence and persistent absence rates remain above those seen nationally. This picture changes regularly due to the mobility of a large proportion of pupils. However, owing to your high-quality liaison, parents are increasingly sharing their plans with you, so you can facilitate pupils' progress both when they are in attendance, and when they are absent.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they broaden their strategic challenge to include not only the attainment, but also the progress of children and pupils from their starting points
- they continue to work effectively with parents, and sharpen further the strategies used to increase pupils' attendance and reduce persistent absence.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracy Fielding
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the special needs coordinator, the family support worker, a parent and members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. I also held telephone calls with your local authority external school improvement adviser and a representative from the access and inclusion team. Together, you and I discussed and agreed the key lines of enquiry for the inspection.

We jointly visited all classes in the school to observe pupils' learning, speak with them and look in their books. I observed a whole-school assembly, met with pupils during the day, and heard some pupils read. I took account of responses to Ofsted's online pupil questionnaire. I considered 12 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 10 text messages from parents. I took account of 20 responses to the staff questionnaire handed out by the school.

I looked at a range of documentation, including information about the work of governors, safeguarding, attendance and behaviour. I also scrutinised and discussed the school's tracking of pupils' progress and attainment, and the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement.