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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Juliet Parker
Headteacher
Shillington Lower School
Greenfields
Shillington
Hitchin
Hertfordshire
SG5 3NX

Dear Mrs Parker

Short inspection of Shillington Lower School

Following my visit to the school on 17 May 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 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. You and the governors have a precise and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. With this clear view, you have worked closely with governors and the local authority to further increase the pace of school improvement. This is resulting in good and improving outcomes for pupils.

With your capable deputy headteacher and your increasingly effective subject leaders, you ensure that teaching standards are high across the school and so pupils make consistently strong progress from their starting points. Teachers and support staff feel strongly that they are part of a team and their contributions are listened to and valued. While raising expectations of teachers, you have ensured that the support and challenge you provide for them means they are keen to continue to improve their practice. All 15 staff who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire stated that they feel well supported and enjoy working at the school.

Alongside leaders' focus on pupils' academic achievements, your thoughtful promotion of pupils' social and emotional well-being continues to be a strength of the school. Pupils told me how much they enjoy coming to school and appreciate the supportive relationships they share with adults and with each other. They recognise that this helps them to learn. One group of pupils told me that the adults in school teach them how to 'overcome our fears and be positive about our

problems'. This reflects the emphasis placed by all staff on developing pupils' positive attitudes to learning.

Parents are equally positive about their children being happy and well looked after at school. They also noted teachers' support for their children's social and emotional development. One parent reflected the views of most when writing: 'The staff have the children's academic and social and emotional well-being as a priority. The school does not just focus on results, but ensures the children are making happy childhood memories.'

Governors provide a strong strategic direction for the school. They take their roles seriously and are uncompromising in their pursuit of excellence. They challenge the standards pupils achieve and monitor and gather information to check for themselves. They have not shied away from taking some significant decisions that have put the school on a sound financial and educational footing for the future. For example, the school is extending its age range with the launch of a nursery unit in September 2017. You and the governors are keen to use this opportunity to further raise standards throughout the school.

You have taken effective action to address the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. For example, you make sure that teaching assistants are well deployed to support and challenge pupils in their learning more consistently. You ensure that teaching assistants receive appropriate training and professional support to improve their practice. During the inspection, teaching assistants were seen modelling language and questioning pupils appropriately to improve pupils' written work, providing individualised support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and encouraging a group of most-able pupils to solve mathematical problems. As a result, teaching assistants' work now contributes more effectively to improving the rate of all pupils' learning.

You recognise that there are still areas to develop to move the school forward and improve the educational experience for pupils. Pupils talk confidently about the school's values and how they demonstrate them through their own actions. They are kind to each other and treat each other with respect. However, pupils are not able to talk confidently about British values and the diversity of life in modern Britain. You acknowledge that the curriculum needs to be further developed to incorporate explicit teaching of these aspects in order that pupils acquire the necessary skills and attitudes that will allow them to participate fully in, and contribute positively to, life in modern Britain.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Regular training means that staff and governors know their responsibilities to ensure pupils' safety and well-being. They are very clear that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Safeguarding is central to the role of the governing body and governors regularly check the school's work to keep pupils safe. The school's systems make sure that

only suitable people are employed to work with children. The induction process for new staff places emphasis on the strong culture of safeguarding which the school promotes.

Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe. You have provided opportunities for them to learn about issues such as e-safety. Pupils told me that there is no bullying in school. They are very clear that they know who to talk to if they have a worry or concern and that the adults in school will help them.

You also ensure that pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They are respectful towards adults and cooperate well together; they enjoy helping each other and playing together at playtimes.

Inspection findings

- In order to check that the school remains good, I followed a number of lines of enquiry. I considered the progress that the pupils have made in lower key stage 2. This is because pupils leave the school part way through a key stage and there are no national assessments to indicate their achievement.
- Pupils who remain at the school after key stage 1 make at least good progress. In all classes, teachers and pupils have positive relationships, and pupils willingly follow teachers' instructions in lessons. Classrooms are attractive; displays celebrate pupils' work and provide them with helpful prompts and examples of how to make their work better. Teachers plan lessons which hold pupils' interest and capture their imagination. Pupils develop their key numeracy and literacy skills through the wider curriculum. They are encouraged to discuss and explain what they are learning to deepen their understanding.
- From the work in exercise books and from speaking with pupils, the evidence shows that they continue to make strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, pupils are being equipped with the academic skills to be fully ready for the next stages of their education. To improve further, you accept that pupils could be better challenged with more opportunities to apply their knowledge, broaden their skills and develop their resilience when they are faced with new challenges.
- Another line of enquiry was to check how leaders are ensuring effective provision for writing in the school. This is because in the most recent Year 2 assessments, although pupils attained higher than average, they did not attain as highly in writing as in reading and mathematics.
- In response to these results, you made improving pupils' writing a whole-school priority and provided additional training for staff. Teachers are now more confident about the national writing standards and what pupils need to do to achieve them. For example, they make sure that pupils have a clear understanding of the features of different types of writing and how to plan and organise their work. Teachers consistently emphasise the importance of using correct grammar to pupils; this is helping pupils to improve their writing. Pupils across all ability groups, including the most able, make good progress in using

spelling, grammar and punctuation accurately.

- During the inspection, I observed children in the Reception Year using their phonics skills with increasing confidence to write simple sentences. Pupils in key stage 1 were writing increasingly meaningful sentences and expressing their ideas well through their widened vocabulary choices. Pupils in key stage 2 respond well to the suitably challenging and stimulating writing tasks that teachers provide for them. For example, the recent focus on increasing extended writing opportunities for pupils in literacy lessons and across other subjects has enabled pupils to apply and embed their skills more frequently and successfully.
- Finally, I looked at how leaders communicate with parents and carers as this was an area for improvement at the previous inspection.
- You and the governors have worked hard to develop and improve the way the school informs and consults with parents and carers, including regularly sending newsletters and reminders out to them. Since the previous inspection, the website has been redesigned. It meets statutory requirements and gives a full picture of all aspects of the school. Parent forum meetings now take place to provide opportunities to get feedback from parents on school-related topics such as changes to the school uniform. Termly consultations between teachers and parents now allow a longer meeting time for more in-depth discussions about children's progress.
- Parents and carers appreciate the ways leaders have sought to improve communication with them and overwhelmingly agree that this enables them to better support their children's educational achievement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- increase pupils' opportunities to learn about British values, through the curriculum, to better prepare them for life in modern Britain
- provide more opportunities for pupils to build their resilience by making their own choices when applying their skills in all subjects across the curriculum.

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

Fiona Webb
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- Meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher and governors, including the chair of governors, where we discussed the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, the school's internal evaluation of its performance, plans for future improvement, and information about current pupils' attendance, progress and attainment.
- I gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included observations of teaching and learning, jointly with you, in all classes; and sampling of pupils' current work across all subjects and across a wide range of abilities.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey to take into consideration. However, I spoke informally to a number of pupils in classrooms about their learning, and met more formally with a group of pupils to talk about their school experience.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff, and case studies about referrals made to external agencies. A discussion was held with you as the school's designated safeguarding lead.
- I also met with the local authority adviser.
- The views of 31 parents who responded to Parent View were taken into account, as well as the 25 responses parents made using the free-text service.
- I also considered the 15 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey.