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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Ms Gillian Sparrow
Headteacher
Hillstone Primary School
Hillstone Road
Shard End
Birmingham
West Midlands
B34 7PY

Dear Ms Sparrow

Short inspection of Hillstone Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 June 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. This is due to leaders' resolute pursuit of the school's mission statement, 'Inspire, care and educate'.

You have created a team which demonstrates a consistent and coherent ambition to provide the best for pupils. Leaders at all levels understand how their role contributes to the achievement of the school's vision and are committed to making it happen. They are well supported in this by a skilled governing body. Governors want the school to give its pupils the best possible start so as to prepare them for the opportunities and responsibilities of adult life. To this end, governors set high expectations for the quality of education and for what the school will do to promote pupils' personal development and skills for life.

You, your staff and governors are unanimous in the desire for your pupils to succeed in the next stage of their education and, ultimately, as productive members of society. As such, leaders place great value on helping pupils to become confident, self-assured and socially capable young people. This drive has led to the design of an innovative and inspiring curriculum. You set no limits to what the school will provide for its pupils. As a result, during their time at Hillstone pupils have experienced an impressively wide range of activities, visits and opportunities that broaden their horizons and raise their ambitions for the future.

You have successfully tackled the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Pupils' work is now presented more neatly. Their books show that they take pride in their work. Your efforts to improve punctuality are helping to reduce lateness.

You and your senior team are always alert to ways in which the school could do better. One example of this is the decision to change the way that mathematics is taught. You chose to do this following careful analysis of the reasons why pupils struggled to reach the higher scores in last year's national tests. You have, sensibly, introduced the new method gradually, starting in the early years and key stage 1. This measured approach has built the expertise of a group of teachers to deliver high-quality mathematics lessons. These lessons teach pupils to think quickly about numbers, then apply their knowledge to complex mathematical situations. This good practice is now being shared across the school in order that all pupils may benefit.

Pupils are very proud of their school and are keen to recommend it to others. They behave well in lessons and move sensibly around the school. Even the children in the kindergarten line up quietly and follow the teacher's instructions. Pupils genuinely enjoy meeting and talking with adults in corridors and classrooms. Adults show similar levels of interest and pleasure in pupils' company. As a result, the school is a cheerful community in which pupils feel valued and respected.

Pupils thrive in the school because of the care that they receive. Parents are very appreciative of the support given to their children and to them. Leaders know each pupil well. All are alert to whether a pupils' educational or emotional needs are being met. As a result, pupils feel well supported in their learning, even when they find it tricky. Nevertheless, you want to move pupils to a level beyond this. You want to help pupils to become resilient learners who can actively learn from their mistakes. You and your team are considering ways to help pupils to learn to persevere and think more deeply about challenging work. An example of this is when answering tricky questions in reading lessons. Currently, many pupils struggle to infer meaning that is not explicitly stated in the text. You want them to be able to think beyond what is printed and to talk about what the author may be suggesting or hinting at.

Safeguarding is effective.

The culture of care, as shown in the school's mission statement, ripples through all aspects of its work. Consequently, safeguarding is taken very seriously. Leaders have ensured that policies and procedures for keeping pupils safe are robustly fit for purpose. The headteacher and pastoral manager ensure that staff are fully trained in child protection matters. Procedures for spotting, recording and following up concerns are comprehensive. No concern is considered too small to record. Cases are discussed with the local authority, when appropriate. Partnerships with other agencies are effective in ensuring that the right support is given to children who may be at risk of harm and to their families.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I examined closely the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. These pupils receive a good quality of education and care. The assistant headteacher responsible for coordinating this work knows their needs in detail. She is knowledgeable about what support each pupil requires and is tenacious in ensuring that it is provided. As a result, these pupils reach their individual targets and make good gains in learning.
- I considered the impact of leaders' actions to improve pupils' outcomes in reading. Younger pupils now acquire phonic skills effectively. This means that almost all reach the standard expected in the national screening check at the end of Year 1. This helps them to tackle new words confidently.
- Reading has a high profile across the school. As a result, pupils read often and many say that they enjoy it. Reading lessons are now used more effectively to teach pupils the skills that they need to understand what they are reading. Standards have improved as a result. However, many pupils still struggle to deduce what the author means if it is not explicitly stated in the text. This is the reason why leaders are embarking on actions to build pupils' resilience and their critical thinking skills.
- I looked at the quality of mathematics teaching. Mathematics is taught well. The new approach to lessons for younger pupils is particularly effective. As a result, these pupils have made substantial progress this year. Plans to spread this impressive practice to the remaining classes are well chosen.
- In addition, I paid particular attention to the progress of disadvantaged pupils in all subjects. The pupil premium funding has been used effectively to improve outcomes for these pupils. Overall, disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to that made nationally by non-disadvantaged pupils. Leaders rigorously track how well disadvantaged pupils are doing. They use the information collected to target resources and support to boost these pupils' progress, if it appears to be too slow. For example, leaders have spotted that some of the most able disadvantaged pupils have not been working at a high enough standard. Actions have been put in place and these pupils are now making faster progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- Teachers help pupils to acquire the confidence and skills to handle failure, as well as success, in their learning, so as to be able to learn from mistakes.
- Pupils use this resilience when answering challenging questions that require them to infer meaning that is not explicitly stated in a text.

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

Yours sincerely

Sandy Hayes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with: the headteacher; the senior leadership team; other school staff; and a group of governors, including the chair. I spoke informally to pupils in lessons. I looked at the 27 responses to the Parent View survey and 29 staff questionnaires. I visited lessons with the headteacher and an assistant headteacher. I looked at the work in a selection of pupils' books. I considered the school's self-evaluation and its plans for development. I took into account pupils' standards of attainment and rates of progress. I read a range of documents, including those related to safeguarding and child protection.