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Mrs Sharon Burnett
Headteacher
Plaistow Hill Infant and Nursery School
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Dear Mrs Burnett

Short inspection of Plaistow Hill Infant and Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 4 July 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 March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. As a relatively new leader, you have, together with your senior leaders and governors, sustained the successful development of the school. Your unwavering commitment to respecting the views of pupils promotes their excellent behaviour and positive attitudes to learning.

Leaders, including governors, work well as a team to accurately check the performance of the school. This enables all leaders to share a comprehensive understanding of the quality of education at the school. Together, you have identified and are successfully tackling the right areas for improvement. As a result, teaching is effective and enables pupils to make good progress in all classes. This is evident in your accurate assessments of pupils' developing skills. Current assessments show increasing numbers of children reaching a good level of development at the end of their year in Reception and pupils working at above average standards at the end of Year 2.

The previous inspection identified the need to further raise pupils' attainment in writing. In most respects, your work in this regard has been effective with, for example, boys now achieving equally as successfully as girls. In response to teachers' raised expectations, pupils are also writing at length and as effectively in other subjects as they are in English. You acknowledge that, although showing positive improvement, recent initiatives to strengthen pupils' knowledge of letters

and sounds and their handwriting have not yet had a full impact.

The school has made significant improvements in other important areas since the previous inspection. For example, well-considered changes in the use of additional funding have quickened the progress of disadvantaged pupils and enhanced pupils' engagement, fitness and skills in sports.

Almost every parent who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire expressed agreement in all aspects, including recommending the school to other parents. They agreed that children are well-cared-for, feel happy and are kept safe at school. One parent encapsulated the views of most when writing, 'Every member of staff knows each child and every parent individually, which makes for such a family feel.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Plaistow Hill is a highly welcoming and inclusive community where the staff's diligence in getting to know the pupils and their families underpins their ability to keep pupils safe. Staff at all levels talked knowledgeably about vulnerable pupils and carefully outlined the well-considered procedures taken to secure their well-being.

You ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. For example, your regular checks of staff recruitment, fire prevention and security procedures ensure full compliance with statutory requirements. Staff and governors update their training regularly so that they are aware of the risks to pupils. Your detailed records of incidents and referrals show that you communicate effectively with outside agencies and parents to safeguard pupils.

Pupils spoken with during the inspection stated that they feel very safe at school and would, 'Tell a teacher straight away if we have any worries.' Pupils show a good awareness of how to stay safe. For example, they play ball games sensibly at breaktimes and swiftly support each other when it is needed. Attendance over time matches the national average. You work well with parents and the local authority welfare officer to follow up any concerns about absence.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry examined why the progress from their starting points of different groups of children in the Nursery and Reception classes, especially boys and disadvantaged children, varied over time.
- Your strong leadership and consistently good provision ensures that children make at least good progress through the Nursery and Reception classes. Your assessments are accurate and show that over two thirds of the children enter the Nursery with typically lower levels of skills than is usual for their age.
- As a result of good teaching, many enter the Reception Year with skills and knowledge that are at least typical for their age. Children, including boys and the most able, as well as disadvantaged children, now sustain good progress in the Reception classes in response to stimulating learning opportunities. By the time

they leave Reception, over two thirds of the children reached a good level of development. These positive outcomes reflect the strengthened use of additional funding to tackle the individual needs of all children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities at an early stage. You recognise that the current focus on improving children's early writing skills needs further development.

- My second line of enquiry examined the teaching and learning of phonics. This is because the proportion of pupils meeting expectations in Years 1 and 2 phonics screening checks has varied and was below average in 2016.
- You have rightly identified that a small number of the pupils who entered the school with lower levels of skill have not reached expectations in phonics screening checks. This academic year, leaders have provided additional training for staff and strengthened the teaching and learning of phonics in the early years and key stage 1. This is evident in the way staff now adapt their teaching to embed pupils' understanding more effectively.
- Teachers also provide workshops for parents to enlist their support in developing their children's reading at home.
- You recognise though that this work has not been sustained long enough yet to ensure that outcomes in phonics screening checks match those found nationally.
- My third line of enquiry focused on the work of leaders and teachers in ensuring that all groups of pupils make at least good progress in relation to their different starting points through key stage 1. This is because standards in reading and writing by the most able and disadvantaged pupils has varied over time.
- You make sure that teachers identify and support pupils' different needs at an early stage. You and other leaders ensure that additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities is used effectively to tackle their individual needs. These pupils respond well to extra adult assistance and are improving their speaking, reading and writing skills more consistently and successfully than in previous years.
- The most able pupils are enthused by the teachers' raised expectations and challenges in the work presented to them. They are developing their spelling, punctuation and expressive writing skills more rapidly, especially when discussing and explaining ideas with their classmates. As a result, an increased and broadly average proportion of pupils attain greater depth in reading and writing by the end of Year 2. You acknowledge though that pupils' handwriting skills are under-developed.
- My fourth line of enquiry examined teaching and learning in science. This is because the standards reached by pupils in this subject were below average at the end of Year 2 in 2016.
- You have addressed this issue very effectively by making sure that pupils have good opportunities to develop their scientific enquiry skills as they move through the school. Work in pupils' topic books and on display in all classrooms shows that pupils undertake a wide range of stimulating experiments. For example, pupils in Year 2 deepened their understanding when investigating how plants react when frozen. As a result, current assessments now show an above-average

proportion of pupils reaching expected standards in science at the end of Year 2.

- My final line of enquiry investigated what leaders have been doing to secure pupils' good attendance. This is because, although average overall, attendance was lower for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities in 2016.
- You and your staff work diligently to promote good attendance. You cooperate well with parents and outside agencies to reduce persistent absence. You have improved the attendance of pupils with special educational needs by providing extra adult support that boosts their confidence and enjoyment of school. Your records show that pupils' medical needs have been the main cause of absence. You remind parents that pupils should not be taken out of school for holidays. However, you are rightly concerned about the increasing holidays taken during school time.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the proportion of pupils achieving expected standards in the phonics screening checks in Years 1 and 2 at least matches the national average
- there is a more consistent and effective approach to the teaching and development of pupils' handwriting skills across the school
- leaders continue their rigorous work to reduce absence, especially unauthorised holidays taken during term time.

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

Yours sincerely

Alexander Baxter
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held meetings with you and other staff with leadership responsibilities. I met with governors and held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. We visited classrooms and scrutinised samples of pupils' work in books. I talked with staff during visits to classrooms, and with pupils and support staff during the lunch break. I examined documents relating to safeguarding, pupils' attendance, and progress and school development. I took account of 38 responses to the Parent View survey, 26 additional parents' written comments and 16 staff questionnaire responses.