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Mr Darren Locke
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Locke

Short inspection of Vine Tree Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 11 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection, and has ensured that the school has continued to improve. The school provides its pupils with a warm and welcoming learning environment in which they are able to develop as learners, and as thoughtful and responsible citizens. Pupils told me that they are happy coming to school, and the smiles on pupils' faces and highly positive relationships they enjoy with their teachers showed that this is the case. Parents too are supportive of the school, and almost all of the parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, said that they would recommend Vine Tree to other parents.

Pupils are polite and welcoming to visitors. Their behaviour around school and in the playground is good. In class, pupils display positive attitudes to learning and support each other well, listening well to their classmates and freely sharing their own ideas. Pupils typically respond quickly to teachers' instructions and settle down to their work with the minimum of fuss. As a result, learning time in class is not wasted and this contributes to the good progress that pupils are making.

Pupils enjoy taking on positions of responsibility around school, and as 'reading gurus' have contributed to recent improvements in outcomes in reading. Other pupils act as 'digital leaders', or show their care for the environment as 'recycling officers' and 'energy monitors'. The school also makes strong provision for developing pupils' awareness of British values, and pupils have a good understanding of democracy and the role of the government. This reflects the

school's positive work in preparing pupils for life in modern Britain.

The school's curriculum is broad and well balanced, providing pupils with a wide range of learning experiences which are enhanced through educational visits and visitors coming to work with pupils in school. Pupils and parents commented on the positive impact of the special 'focus weeks' that the school runs. In these, pupils have the opportunity to be more deeply immersed in a subject, such as science, and this has a positive impact on their learning and interest in the subject. Pupils learn about the importance of living healthily, and can describe the healthy choices available to them at lunchtimes. They also have plenty of opportunity to take part in physical activities, both in school and through after-school clubs, and many have represented the school in sports such as football and indoor athletics.

You have successfully tackled the areas for improvement highlighted by the last inspection. Standards in writing are improving strongly. Teachers display good subject knowledge and ensure that pupils have a range of opportunities to develop their writing skills, including in different areas of the curriculum. They also encourage pupils to develop a wide vocabulary, challenging them to improve the content of their written work by making adventurous word choices. The subject leader for English has a clear vision for improvement and checks carefully on the quality of teaching and learning to ensure that it continues to improve. Teachers are also more effective in ensuring that they meet the needs of the most able pupils, and the proportion of pupils working at the higher levels of attainment is increasing.

Further improvements have also been secured. You have reviewed and updated the school's systems for assessing and tracking pupils' progress to good effect. Teachers now have a more accurate understanding of pupils' current levels of knowledge and understanding and so can plan the next steps in their learning. The changes that have been made to the teaching of phonics have had a significant impact on phonics results, which are rising rapidly. As a consequence, pupils in key stage 1 are becoming more confident and skilled readers.

You and other leaders know the school well and your evaluation of the school's performance is accurate. You acknowledge that there is scope for further improvements to be made, and that the full effect of recent improvement work has not yet been seen. For example, work to improve outcomes in mathematics has been effective in accelerating the progress being made by the most able pupils and overall attainment in mathematics is rising. However, improvements currently are strongest in key stage 1 and the start of key stage 2. You recognise though that the most pressing area of need is in early years, where an improvement in results has stalled and the proportion of children achieving a good level of development remains stubbornly just below the national average.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality. Staff and governors receive regular training to ensure that they maintain an up-to-date knowledge of good practice in safeguarding. There are clear procedures in place for staff to report any

worries they may have about a pupil's well-being and good use is made of an online system for recording and tracking any such concerns. Leaders also ensure that checks are made on staff, governors, volunteers and regular visitors to the school to make sure that they are suitable people to work with children.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and every parent who responded to Parent View agreed that the school kept their children safe. Pupils understand what bullying is, but say that bullying in their school hardly ever happens. They are firm in their belief that any form of prejudice is unacceptable. Pupils also have a good understanding of the importance of staying safe when using the internet, for example by not giving personal details to people they meet online.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of different key lines of enquiry. The first of these was to consider how well the most able pupils were achieving, particularly in mathematics. Results in 2016 indicated that the proportion reaching the higher levels in mathematics in key stages 1 and 2 was below average. Leaders recognised this issue and have taken effective action to accelerate the rates of progress made by the most able pupils. The drive and enthusiasm of the mathematics leader has secured improvements in the effectiveness of teachers' planning, and has raised the level of teachers' expectations. Teachers make sure that they provide pupils with opportunities to apply their skills by solving challenging mathematical problems, and to explain their reasoning. Provisional results for 2017 show an increase in the proportion of pupils attaining the higher standards not only in mathematics, but also in reading and writing. This confirms the positive impact of leadership at all levels, and illustrates the school's continuing capacity to improve.
- The second key line of enquiry focused on the quality of the school's curriculum. I was particularly interested to see how well the curriculum supported pupils' writing development. Evidence in pupils' books, on displays around the school and from comments made by pupils and parents confirmed that the curriculum at Vine Tree is strong. Pupils find the work that they do interesting, and can describe their learning in a range of subjects, including science, history and art. Focus weeks and trips to places such as Chester, as part of work about the Romans, add further interest and depth to pupils' studies. Teachers skilfully use texts by authors such as Cressida Cowell and David Almond to make links between work in literacy and other subjects, which pupils say that they particularly enjoy. Pupils are able to develop and apply their writing skills when writing diary entries in history or explanations in science and geography.
- The third key line of enquiry looked at achievement in early years, and whether children made strong enough progress from their starting points on entry. Children come into Reception class from a range of different nurseries and pre-school settings with skills and understanding that are broadly typical for their age. However, many children are less secure in some aspects of their personal and social development, language development and writing. They make good progress and catch up quickly in many areas. For example, children rapidly grow in confidence and learn to listen more carefully to each other and to adults. Some

children progress quickly and exceed the expected standard in some areas. However, many children's progress in reading, writing and mathematics is steady, rather than strong, and this limits the proportion who reach a good level of development. Provision does not consistently give children the chances they need to develop their reading and writing skills or to become more confident working with numbers and shapes, and leaders do not use assessment information with sufficient focus to identify and address these gaps effectively. You are aware of this issue, and plans are in place to improve outcomes in early years.

- An important aspect of the continuing improvements at Vine Tree is the quality of leadership within the school. You know the school well and, with good support from governors, have continued to make improvements to the provision on offer, such as in the development of a library and computer suite. Subject leaders provide both knowledge and enthusiasm and their work is central to the ongoing improvements in the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning. Governors are highly committed and are providing increasingly effective support and challenge to leaders to ensure that the school continues to move forward.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the effectiveness of provision in early years improves so that children make quicker progress in developing their early reading, writing and mathematics skills
- recent improvements in mathematics are embedded and sustained to ensure that outcomes continue to rise, particularly for pupils in key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Neil Dixon

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection I met with you and four members of the governing body, and I had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I also met the leaders responsible for English, mathematics and early years. I considered 11 responses from parents to Parent View. I met with a group of pupils and heard a number of other pupils read. I visited classes in early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2, and I looked at examples of pupils' work. I also looked at a range of documentation covering different aspects of the school's work.