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Claire Logan
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Dear Miss Logan

Short inspection of Northfields Infants and Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 14 September 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.

You lead your school in a calm but passionate manner. It is to your credit that the staffing at Northfields has been very stable for a number of years. Staff say that they are very proud to work in the school where 'there is a culture of collaboration and support'. You are excited by the recent appointment of two new teachers and looking forward to embedding the role of the relatively new special educational needs coordinator. Since the previous inspection, almost the entire governing body complement has changed. A new vice-chair of governors and several very recently appointed governors support the chair of governors well in her role. Parents are effusive in their praise of the school and your staff. As one parent put it, Northfields provides 'a brilliant platform from which my son can express himself'.

It is clear that you, your staff and governors have not stopped working to continually improve aspects of the school since the last inspection. The areas for improvement from the previous report have been tackled with vigour. You and your leaders set high expectations. Teaching, therefore, is never less than good over time. However, teachers are in different year groups from last year and a quarter of teachers are also new to the school. Because the new teachers have no previous pupils' work to show yet, the impact that they are having on pupils' progress is not as evident as that of other members of staff. You recognise that there is potential for a lack of consistency and have stated that this is an area that you will be looking

at closely. Staff are used to your 'challenging conversations when necessary' because you all share a collective desire to do the best for all children and pupils. As one member of staff said to me: 'I will go the extra mile, because the children are important. I want to get it right, to be a support network for children and families.'

You are all constantly reviewing the curriculum to ensure that it suits the needs of the particular children and pupils you have at any one time. For example, your early years leader and her team have made great strides in working with parents to ensure that the best possible provision is in place for all children. You and your governors are rightly proud of this work. 'They listen to parents and I have felt informed and actively involved in moving my daughter forward in her learning' was one parent's comment among many.

In your previous inspection, governors were asked to improve the effectiveness with which they check the effective use of additional funding. Following an audit, leaders and governors proactively recruited new governors with specific expertise and skills, and made considerable alterations to the way the governing body functions. As a result, it is now working very effectively with parents, leaders and members of staff. Governors work alongside class teachers in each year group to follow a cohort of children and pupils through the school. This has enabled them to have an appropriate and in-depth knowledge of how well children and pupils are doing. Governors are, therefore, able to effectively question and challenge leaders to ensure that disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make as much progress as they can.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and other leaders ensure that all safeguarding procedures are robust and fit for purpose. All of your staff are rigorous in their approach to, and vigilance in, keeping children and pupils safe. Records are of good quality and demonstrate that you pursue any concerns tenaciously. As a result, children and pupils learn in a safe environment, both inside and outside the classroom. Governors are equally vigilant in their checking of safeguarding procedures. They undertake regular checks of the single central register and ensure that they are trained, for example, in safer recruitment. This ensures that appropriate checks are made on the suitability of staff to work with children and pupils.

All parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree that their children are safe, happy and well looked after in school. Pupils love coming to school, where learning is 'fun and interesting'. They say that they feel safe and know who to go to if they have any worries. For such young pupils, they are very confident about how to keep themselves safe. For example, when using computers, they know not to give their password to anyone else and 'not to go on a computer without the consent of an adult'.

Inspection findings

- I pursued a number of lines of enquiry to ensure that the school remained good.

The previous report called for a number of actions to take place to secure continued progress for different groups of pupils. I therefore checked on the quality of teaching over time. During the inspection, I gathered evidence from observing learning in all classes, checked work in pupils' books and looked at the school's own assessment information of current and past pupils.

- The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 in 2016 was broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving greater depth in reading and writing was above average, while the proportion in mathematics was broadly in line with the national average. Provisional results for 2017 show an improving picture. The school's own assessment information shows that pupils make good progress throughout key stage 1. Pupils who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make at least typical, and often good, progress from their varying starting points.
- It was helpful to see pupils' books from the previous academic year for those teachers who were at the school. It is clear that pupils in Year 2 make good progress over the year. You recognise the need to ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment remains consistently strong, despite the many internal changes in staffing that have taken place.
- You and your deputy headteacher track the progress of pupils regularly and thoroughly. Teachers check on pupils' understanding during lessons and quickly adapt their teaching when it is necessary.
- Recently, you reorganised working arrangements for teaching assistants, which is having a good impact on pupils' learning. Pupils say that they are 'helped to get better' in their work because of the support they are given, both by teaching assistants and teachers. As a result, the vast majority of pupils make similar progress in reading, writing and mathematics, often from a low baseline.
- Only 36% of Reception children in 2016 started with the skills expected for their age in communication, language and literacy. Much has been done, therefore, to ensure that children are better prepared for school, especially those who do not attend the school's nursery. Leaders make regular visits to settings where children go prior to their arrival at Northfields.
- The school liaises well with parents and now provides numerous opportunities for parents to come into school to help them understand the ways they can support their children with their learning. Teachers visit the children's homes to speak with parents and gain a really good picture of their children's interests. Parents have responded extremely positively to all of these initiatives. All of the parents of children in the new Reception classes, for example, have taken part in at least one of the activities you have offered. The impact is evident.
- Early assessment of the current Reception class demonstrates that children's skills are more in line with their age and stage. In fact, it is difficult to ascertain which children came through your nursery and which did not. They are all happy, settled and very confident in their new setting.
- As a result of good leadership, the early years is a strength of the school. Children make good, and sometimes better, progress from often low starting

points. The links you have made with, for example, the local authority's speech therapy provision have made a considerable difference to children's communication, language and literacy skills.

- The array of planned activities in the early years encourages children to develop their early reading, writing and number skills. Adults gently support children with appropriate and probing questioning so that children develop and practise their skills. Despite being very early in the term, children confidently play together or on their own, and interest themselves in painting, building homes and playing skittles and recording their scores with enthusiasm. It was a delight to see.
- My second key line of enquiry related to the curriculum and provision for boys in particular. Leaders have been very proactive in designing a curriculum that suits the needs of each cohort of pupils. Teachers select topics or themes that interest boys and choose books that encourage boys to use their imagination and write freely. Although leaders acknowledge that girls are still achieving better than boys in writing, they have tracked very closely the improvements that have been made.
- Assessment information for the last three years shows that the difference between boys' and girls' writing is diminishing. I scrutinised writing for a number of boys across the school and compared their progress to girls. This confirmed the school's own assessment that the vast majority of boys are making similar progress to girls. Teachers take every opportunity to develop and display writing so that pupils appreciate its value. The Incredible Hulk display in one class – titled 'Our work is Incredible' – is just one example of how teachers entice pupils to write and have their work celebrated on a display.
- The final line of enquiry related to governors and how well they monitor the use of additional funding for pupils who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Governors have worked well with leaders and have an accurate view of how additional money is effectively used.
- Governors each have responsibilities for monitoring and challenging. For example, working closely with the special educational needs coordinator, governors have an excellent understanding of what is being provided and how it is being assessed for the impact on pupils' learning. 'If it doesn't work, we change it because all children learn in different ways' is the governors' consistent mantra.
- Not only do governors know the provision for these pupils and those who are disadvantaged, but they see it in action. Governors make regular visits to the classes in their monitoring role to look at how well individuals are responding to often very focused and specialist support. The number of children and pupils who have additional needs is growing, as is the complexity of those needs. Governors have been wholly supportive of your vision to ensure that extra support is used effectively, particularly for those who are most vulnerable. As a result, from their varying starting points, progress by pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is at least as expected and often good.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the achievement of boys in writing continues to improve so that it is more in line with that of girls throughout the school
- all teachers' expectations of pupils are consistently high.

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

Yours sincerely

Ruth Brock
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher, the leader of the early years, the family support worker and the special educational needs coordinator. I also met with a group of pupils from key stage 1 and three governors, including the chair of governors.

You and I visited each class to observe the learning, including hearing children and pupils read and speaking to them about their work. We looked at pupils' books to see progress in their work across a range of subjects. I observed children and pupils around the school and in the playground. We reviewed school documents, including your self-evaluation, development plans and safeguarding records, including the single central record.

I also considered the 65 responses to Parent View, many of which were by text, and the 22 responses from staff to Ofsted's survey.