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Miss Sarah Woodham
Headteacher
Stondon Lower School
Hillside Road
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Dear Miss Woodham

Short inspection of Stondon Lower School

Following my visit to the school on 20 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 October 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 and your capable senior team have an accurate understanding of what needs to be done to secure the continual development of the school. All leaders, including governors, act with determination and effectiveness in their work. Staff are also united in their support for the positive direction in which you are taking the school. The school's strong values of, 'everyone, every chance, every day' lie at the heart of the very supportive and nurturing environment offered to all children. Consequently, pupils across the year groups make good progress and their attitudes to learning are often exceptional.

Parents express high approval of your work. This was shown in their responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and their meetings with me. Parents were very supportive of the school's work to teach their children, make them happy, keep them safe and offer them high-quality care. They also praised the support they are given to help their children to learn when not in school. Parents reported how approachable they find teachers, should they have any concerns, and their satisfaction at the school's responses to concerns they raise. The vast majority of parents said they would recommend the school to other parents. A number approached me to report their fulsome support for the school and said they felt it would be doing both you and your teachers a disservice if they had not taken the time to do so.

Your school's ethos of 'values education' supports pupils from all backgrounds to develop the qualities required to be a good citizen. These include working hard, respecting others, learning from mistakes and success in academic work. It also promotes strong personal and cultural development. A recent television arts and music project featured the highly successful animation skills of your Year 4 pupils, accompanied by music by Handel. Pupils also demonstrate an active interest in sport, music and the arts and are highly committed to parliamentary democracy.

Since the previous inspection, teachers and leaders have worked hard to improve the school. Information about pupils' previous achievements is now used more effectively to plan work and activities which are more challenging and suited to the learning of pupils of different abilities. In addition, teachers and leaders benefit from effective professional development. This helps all staff to appreciate the quality of teaching required if pupils are to reach the highest standards of attainment at different ages. Nonetheless, you agree that teachers still need to act more quickly when any pupil experiences difficulties with their learning or repeats the same errors in subjects including mathematics, writing and reading.

Governors have a very clear view of how well the school is performing and provide an effective balance of challenge and support to all leaders. You have also acted well on the advice offered by the local authority advisory service and your school improvement partner. As a result, leadership at your school is very secure and this is demonstrated by the high quality of the work undertaken by your senior team. You agree that teaching should be improved by teachers making sure all pupils receive the help they need when they are unsure about how to tackle their work. You also agree that some pupils should be receiving more challenging work across all the subjects of the wider curriculum, especially with written work.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors undertake their statutory duties with great diligence. All staff are suitably trained, using the most recent government advice. They are fully aware about what to do and who to inform should a concern arise about a child. Equally, pupils have total confidence in the school's ability to keep them safe and help them should they experience difficulties. Pupils report that any instances of bullying are tackled swiftly on the rare occasions that they happen. The school's detailed records show that staff are highly observant and quickly report any concerns about safeguarding to leaders, who take appropriate action.

The school's checks on the suitability of staff to work with children are highly effective and well organised. Leaders' safer recruitment practices are equally effective. Arrangements for checking on the suitability of volunteers, temporary workers and visitors are also subject to the same high-quality checks. The most vulnerable pupils receive high-quality, ongoing care. Leaders communicate effectively with appropriate agencies and information about children is shared very carefully. The maintenance of pupils' records allows critical information to be updated regularly. Consequently, leaders can act effectively to help pupils should changes occur in their circumstances.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain that the school remains good, two of my key lines of enquiry were about pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. Test results in 2015 and 2016 suggested that some groups of pupils had not gone on to reach the standards they were capable of by the end of Year 2. They included boys and disadvantaged children, some of whom had special educational needs and/or disabilities. Your accurate evaluation of pupils' learning had already identified this.
- The school's provisional 2017 Year 2 assessment results for reading, writing and mathematics show that around four fifths or more of pupils reached the expected standard for their age and over a quarter reached greater depth. Similarly, the progress of pupils across key stage 2 has improved and more are reaching above the expected standard for their different ages.
- Visits to classrooms quickly demonstrated that a wide range of good teaching is securing the effective development of pupils' mathematical, writing and reading skills. My scrutiny of pupils' mathematics work across the school showed clear improvements being made during this term and in the last academic year. When reading, younger pupils' comprehension skills are more accurate and older pupils are more skilled when inferring what poets or writers mean by the different ways they use language. Observations of pupils' written work shows that their progress improved by the second half of the last academic year. This was particularly so for boys' handwriting, spelling, grammar and sentence skills.
- At the previous inspection, the school was asked to improve assessment arrangements and your own evaluation of teaching also identified this as an area for development. Inspection evidence shows that teachers' assessments are accurate and teachers are skilled at explaining concepts to the great majority of pupils in different year groups. However, you agreed that the progress of small numbers of pupils has been slower because checks on their understanding of learning have not been precise enough in lessons. Consequently, they sometimes repeat errors or learn more slowly than other pupils.
- Another line of enquiry was concerned with the effectiveness of the school's work to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils, some of whom have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Year 2 assessments in 2015 and 2016 showed some disadvantaged pupils were not achieving as well as others nationally. You have brought about significant improvements in your work to help individual pupils. Pupils are assessed very accurately and the teaching they receive is now more effective. Their learning is closely monitored and their achievement is quickly improving.
- I examined the actions you have taken to improve pupils' achievement in the wider range of subjects across the curriculum. Your own evaluations and development plan identified the need to improve pupils' higher-order skills across subjects including geography, art and design, religious education and computing. Assessment records, curriculum planning and pupils' work show that while they cover important skills in these subjects, they do not currently complete written

work to the same quality or depth as that found in history, science or English.

- My final line of enquiry was concerned with attendance. Previous attendance records for 2016 showed that particular groups of pupils were persistently absent more often than was the case nationally, and these included disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Scrutiny of current and recent attendance records and discussions with yourself demonstrated a significant improvement in attendance since 2016 and the reduction of persistent absence to nil for all groups. Leaders and staff have been highly effective and determined in their work to reduce absence.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- in all lessons, teachers pay closer attention to any pupils whose progress has been slower and act quickly and precisely to help them overcome misunderstandings as they attempt new work
- less-confident pupils and those with lower attainment are provided with the help they need to make thorough use of their knowledge as they attempt higher-order mathematics and English work
- pupils are provided with more challenging written work in subjects across the wider curriculum, including geography, art and design, and religious education.

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

David Turner
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During this short inspection, I met with you, senior leaders and two members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.
- I also met with six members of staff to discuss their safeguarding knowledge and training.
- As part of my evaluation of specialist support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, I met with the special educational needs coordinator.
- Together with the senior leader responsible, I looked at current arrangements for supporting disadvantaged pupils.
- Accompanied by yourself, I visited lessons, looked at pupils' work in books and

spoke with pupils throughout the day. I also held a meeting with pupils from key stage 1 and key stage 2.

- I held telephone meetings with an adviser from the local authority and the school's school improvement partner, to discuss their evaluations of the school's performance.
- I reviewed school documentation, assessment information, policies and information posted on the website.
- I scrutinised a range of documentation about the school's safeguarding work, including the single central record, training records and its systems for managing information.
- I took account of the 44 responses to Parent View, the online questionnaire, 33 free-text comments from parents and 16 responses to the online staff questionnaire. In addition, I took account of the 45 responses to the online pupil questionnaire and the view of parents whom I met at the start of the school day.