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Mr Richard Lilley
Principal
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Dear Mr Lilley

Short inspection of Sparken Hill Academy

Following my visit to the school on 3 October 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 December 2010.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education since the school converted to an academy. Leaders have worked hard to successfully create a harmonious learning environment where staff work closely together. You are passionate about your school and promote a caring culture where every pupil is highly valued and known well by you and your staff.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and parents speak very highly of the care and quality of education their children receive. For example, one parent stated, 'My children are all happy at this school. Teachers are well equipped to help under many and varied circumstances, often going above and beyond.'

Pupils are enthusiastic learners. They particularly enjoy learning through topics and using learning strategies that motivate them and inspire their imagination. For example, Year 5 pupils enthusiastically told me about their topic of 'Harry Potter' where they were using computer technology to create their own descriptions of scenes from the story of *Harry Potter and the philosopher's stone*. One child commented, 'I love using the technology because I can use my imagination and share my ideas with other people through the interactive white board.'

The school environment is welcoming and stimulating for pupils. Staff work hard to create a positive climate for learning. Consequently, pupils are proud of their school and behave well. They have good relationships with their teachers and other staff.

Staff teach pupils to understand the importance of respecting others and valuing diversity. As a result, pupils are thoughtful, reflective and concentrate well in class. One Year 6 pupil told me, 'It wouldn't be right if everyone was the same. We are all different and that makes us like a family at Sparken Hill. We treat people like we want to be treated ourselves.'

School leaders' passion and commitment are driving the school's ambition to do the best for its pupils. Your self-evaluation accurately informs your policies, actions and staff training. For example, you recognised that the quality of teaching and learning in phonics needed to improve. It was clear during this inspection that there have been significant improvements in the quality of teaching and learning in this area. Consequently, a higher proportion of pupils in Year 1 attain the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check.

The governing body provides school leaders with effective support and challenge. Governors are knowledgeable and have a range of relevant skills. They regularly check the actions taken by leaders to secure improvements. They fulfil their strategic role effectively. Governors maintain a focus on pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and on disadvantaged pupils. As a result, they ensure that funding for these pupils is used effectively.

You have dealt effectively with the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Teachers now plan work which challenges pupils in lessons. When looking in pupils' books, I could see that most able pupils, in particular, in key stage 2 have opportunities to extend and deepen their learning. One Year 3 pupil remarked to me that 'the challenges help me to understand better because I have to really use my brain!'

You successfully improved the number of pupils attaining the average and higher levels in English and mathematics, and increased the rates of progress pupils make by the end of key stage 2. School leaders realise that subsequent changes to the national curriculum and the way outcomes are assessed have now seen your focus shift to further increasing the number of pupils attaining the expected and higher standards in English and mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders have ensured that there is an excellent culture of safeguarding within the school. Staff and governors keep up to date with training. Safeguarding leaders ensure that all adults, including visitors, are aware of their responsibility to safeguard children. Staff know what to do to keep pupils safe. You and your team work actively with external agencies and refer concerns in a timely manner. Through your development of the community team, including the attendance officer, you have ensured that a dedicated team of staff are vigilant and prepared to take decisive and prompt action, when needed, to secure pupils' well-being.

Pupils are safe and happy in school. They say that bullying or examples of poor

behaviour are now rare but when they do happen staff deal with them quickly and fairly. Pupils feel well looked after by staff in school. They are given clear guidance on potential risks and are taught how to stay safe in different situations. These include how to use the internet safely and dangers from strangers. Pupils highly value the many extra-curricular opportunities provided for them such as the radio and television broadcasting activities and the boxing, orienteering and pony clubs.

Inspection findings

- Your leadership and that of your senior leaders have ensured that the school has remained strong throughout the many changes that have occurred over the last few years, including a merger with another school and the subsequent relocation to a new, larger school building. As a result, pupils have significantly benefited from improved provision, stimulating resources and a calm, interesting environment that is highly conducive to learning.
- School leaders have acted promptly to address the needs of families in the community. They are passionate about the well-being of the pupils in their care. All staff work hard to raise pupils' aspirations and provide support for vulnerable families.
- Leaders invite external support agencies to work within the school through 'soft bases'. As a result, families receive prompt and appropriate interventions for a variety of needs. Leaders' provision of the school farm is particularly valued by parents and pupils for its therapeutic qualities. One parent explained that time spent with the school dog has 'completely changed my daughter's attitude towards school. Now, she can't wait to come to school!'
- The majority of children join the school with knowledge and skills that are well below those expected for their age in most areas of learning. Provision is well planned to engage children and meet the needs of boys and girls in exciting and interactive ways. Teachers plan trips and experiences to ensure that children have good-quality, real-life experiences. This enhances children's vocabulary and understanding of the world around them. As a result, despite being below national average expectations, good-quality teaching means that an increasing number of children achieve a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year.
- School leaders were disappointed with the attainment of pupils at the end of key stage 1 this year. You had previously identified that the performance of these pupils may be low due to a number of significant factors. Effective focused teaching and additional support are ensuring that these pupils are currently doing well.
- In 2017, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standards in reading and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 improved and were in line with national averages. This was because you modified the curriculum to better meet the needs of pupils and to raise standards. As a result, pupils across the school now get more opportunities to read good-quality texts and solve a variety of challenging mathematical problems.
- School leaders have correctly identified that attainment in writing at the end of

key stage 2 was lower in 2017 due to a lack of consistency in pupils' application of grammar and punctuation skills. Actions to improve writing this year have already started so that pupils benefit from additional support and specific focused teaching.

- You have developed highly skilled middle leadership teams. They ensure that teachers use the raft of assessment data for groups of pupils to effectively challenge and support pupils in their learning. Teams work well together and accurately identify strengths and areas for improvements. However, you recognise there is further work to be done to enable middle leaders to monitor pupils' progress more precisely in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- Scrutiny of pupils' books shows that pupils make good progress in a range of subjects. Work is neatly presented and pupils are proud of their work. They apply their English and mathematics skills well in other subjects. Nevertheless, some pupils, particularly in key stage 1, do not get enough regular opportunities for further challenge so that they can deepen their understanding.
- Attendance is below national averages overall. You work well with families in your community to support pupils in attending school regularly. Your community team, including safeguarding leaders, takes prompt action to ensure that pupils are safe. You have rewarded pupils for good attendance and taken action against parents who condone their child's absence from school. As a result, attendance is improving but is not yet in line with national figures.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- pupils, particularly in key stage 1, have more regular opportunities for further challenge in a range of subjects
- systems are refined so that middle leaders can monitor pupils' progress more precisely in subjects other than English and mathematics
- actions to improve regular attendance are sustained.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephanie Innes-Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and several of your senior and middle leaders. I spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day and I met with a group of pupils. I met with five members of the governing body.

We visited classrooms together and I looked at a range of pupils' work. We discussed the progress of different groups of pupils and the school's plans for improvement. I considered the responses of parents from Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I considered the responses of staff and pupils from Ofsted's online surveys. I also took into account the responses from parents, staff and pupils to the school's own questionnaires. I scrutinised evidence from a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school's current performance, information regarding procedures for safeguarding and monitoring of behaviour, information on how the pupil premium is spent, analysis of attendance and a number of policy documents, including those for safeguarding and behaviour. I examined the school's website to check that it meets requirements on the publication of specified information. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and out on the playground and in the lunch hall. I checked the school's single central register to ensure that it met current safeguarding requirements.