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3 November 2017

Mrs Susan Vaughan  
Stowlawn Primary School  
Green Park Avenue  
Stowlawn  
Bilston  
West Midlands  
WV14 6EH

Dear Mrs Vaughan

### **Short inspection of Stowlawn Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 18 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 the school was judged to be good in January 2013.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You have taken successful action to tackle areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Standards in writing and mathematics have risen and you have increased the range of activities to challenge the most able pupils. You and other leaders are aware that pupils' progress in reading is not as strong as that seen in writing and mathematics. In response, you have put initiatives in place to improve phonics teaching and develop pupils' comprehension skills. The next step for the school is to sharpen up assessment of reading in order to keep a closer eye on pupils' progress in different aspects of reading. Some aspects of information sharing between the school and local authority, particularly in relation to pupils who move schools, could also be improved.

The school has a strong and positive ethos of care and community. You have created a stimulating learning environment where pupils feel safe and thrive, both educationally and socially.

In recent times, pupil numbers have increased and the school is full with no spare places. You have plans in place to become a two-form entry primary school from

September 2018, pending council approval.

Parents value the support and care their children receive in school. They say the school is a welcoming place where pupils are happy and encouraged to do their best. Of those who responded to Parent view, 94% would recommend the school to others.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school ensures that all the proper checks on staff and visitors are carried out and records are kept up to date and stored securely. The school's single central record is complete and is regularly checked by the local authority's safeguarding adviser.

Pupils feel safe and say there are adults they can go to if they feel sad or worried. In conversations with me, they pointed out school posters with pictures of staff who can help them. Pupils know about e-safety and how to keep safe online. They understand what bullying is and acknowledge that it has happened occasionally. However, they also say it is always dealt with swiftly by staff so it does not become a problem.

Governors and staff have received appropriate training, including in the 'Prevent' duty, and are aware that children's safety is everyone's responsibility.

During this inspection, the school had to manage a fire evacuation caused by a false alarm. It was conducted very efficiently, which is testimony to the school's well-organised safety routines and pupils' super behaviour.

Attendance registers are kept correctly and unexplained pupil absence is followed up. That said, there is scope to speed up procedures when checking on pupils who move away from the local area.

### **Inspection findings**

- You have established an effective leadership team and an aspirational culture. You and other leaders have high expectations of staff and pupils and there is a respectful and positive learning climate throughout the school. The school building is spacious and well resourced and classrooms are bright and stimulating. It is an orderly, calm and purposeful place in which to learn and play. Around the school, pupils' work is valued and displayed with pride.
- Teachers use time in lessons productively. Pupils focus well on their learning because teachers reinforce expectations for conduct and set clear tasks that challenge pupils' thinking.
  
- Since the previous inspection, there have been sustained improvements in

mathematics and writing. For instance, the proportions of pupils reaching age-related expectations or above in both these subjects have improved and are close to national figures. However, standards in reading remain below average with boys' reading lagging behind that of girls. You and other leaders are aware of this and have taken action to boost progress and raise standards.

- For example, you have improved the reading environment and introduced a whole-school timetable for daily reading activities. These recent changes ensure that all pupils have access to more books and read more often. Teachers read to pupils every day and comprehension tasks are now better suited to pupils' needs. You have introduced new texts and fiction books to develop and widen pupils' understanding and vocabulary.
- Even so, there is still more to be done to sharpen up assessment in reading. Sometimes, staff are not quick to notice when pupils' interest or progress in reading starts to slip. Consequently, they do not vary their approach in order to improve pupils' reading skills or motivate and inspire reluctant readers. Some middle-ability boys, for example, told me they found it difficult to find books in school that interested them.
- Phonics teaching, however, is pitched well with a range of activities suited to pupils' different needs. The use of new resources and regular staff training, coupled with your attentive monitoring of teaching, is having a positive impact on pupils' progress and standards in phonics. Teachers have secure subject knowledge, speak clearly and ensure that all pupils are attentive and do their best. The results are clear to see. Since 2015, scores in the Year 1 phonics check have risen year after year with the most recent results showing that almost 80% reached the expected standard for their age.
- You and your staff know pupils and parents well. The school team takes time to build good relationships between home and school. Staff visit pupils in their homes before they start in the nursery, which helps pupils to settle in quickly. Effective teaching and exciting activities, such as outdoor learning in the forest school area, help children to grow in confidence and develop positive attitudes to learning and school life. While the majority of children start in early years with a level of knowledge and skill below that typical for their age, they make good gains. By the time they are ready to start in Year 1, an increasing proportion are ready for the demands of the key stage 1 curriculum.
- Parents express largely positive views about the school. During this inspection, parents told me how pleased they were with the quality of teaching, with some parents being particularly appreciative of the school's work to support children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- You regularly get a high response to an annual questionnaire that you send to parents and use the responses to inform school development planning. Parents appreciate the attention that you give to their views.
- In lessons and around the school, pupils behave well. Lunchtime in the hall is a particularly pleasant social occasion. During this inspection, a music teacher was playing the piano for pupils to listen to. It was at once a calming and uplifting experience and is typical of the school's thoughtful and creative approach to

enriching pupils' experiences at school.

- Pupils say they feel safe and are happy at school. They speak animatedly about the things they enjoy, such as school plays, dressing up, music and French lessons. Year 6 pupils say they enjoy their time at the school and feel they are being well prepared for secondary school.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to build upon, evaluate and refine their work to develop pupils' comprehension skills, vocabulary and inspire an interest in reading so that standards rise to match those reached in mathematics and writing
- ensure that teachers' reading assessments identify slow progress quickly so that timely support can be put in place
- tighten up routines for checking on the whereabouts of pupils who move away from the local area, so that information held by the local authority is acted upon quickly and shared with the school as appropriate.

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

Yours sincerely

Diane Pye  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, senior leaders and teaching staff. I also met with two governors and two local authority advisers. I carried out short observations of teaching and looked at pupils' work in books and on display.

By the end of the inspection, there were 16 recent responses on Parent View and 10 free-text responses. There were 19 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and 48 responses to the pupil questionnaire. I took account of these responses and talked with some pupils and parents.

I looked at a number of documents, including: pupils' progress information; the school's own evaluation of its performance; improvement plans; information about the work of the governing body; leaders' written reports to governors; records of checks on the quality of teaching and learning; and several school policy documents. I also checked the school's website and the procedures for keeping

pupils safe. I asked members of staff, pupils and parents about safeguarding matters.