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Mrs Kate Mathews
Headteacher
Southwood School
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Dear Kate Mathews

Short inspection of Southwood School

Following my visit to the school on 7 November 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 (your predecessor school) was judged to be good in June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. As headteacher, you provide clear-sighted and purposeful leadership to drive improvements. Working closely with other school leaders you have developed a team that focuses on shared accountability. You provide a clear focus on achieving the highest quality of teaching. This is recognised and greatly valued by staff, pupils and parents. One parent commented, 'It's a really safe school and the teachers are giving their best to make progress on learning with all the pupils.'

Pupils are proud of their school and so work hard, are confident and appreciate the good learning opportunities provided. The school vision of 'respect, resilience, responsibility and reflect' underpins the work of the school. Pupils' attitudes to learning continue to be a strength of the school. This is a happy school due to the high levels of pastoral care that enable pupils to learn together and thrive.

At the time of the last inspection, the school was asked to raise achievement and teaching by helping all pupils to develop both their independence in lessons and their use of information and communication technology to improve their research skills. Your work in these areas over time is effective. As a school, you have embedded the use of information communication technology and provided a range of effective resources that help pupils enhance their questioning and reasoning

skills. This has led to pupils being more independent, and more pupils are making better progress.

Senior leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and those areas requiring further improvement. Progress in writing is not as strong as it is in reading and mathematics. You have clear plans to address this to ensure that the progress of pupils in writing matches the progress achieved in reading and mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, together with your staff and the governing body, have created a strong safeguarding culture. Your staff are vigilant and record all concerns they have about pupils. You know your pupils and families well and this enables you to ensure that your pupils get the help they need to stay safe. Robust procedures ensure that all statutory checks are completed for adults working in the school.

All school staff receive timely and good-quality training to ensure that they are confident applying the school's policies and guidance in relation to child protection issues. Parents and staff who completed the online questionnaires stated, without exception, that children are safe at this school. Pupils with whom I spoke agreed that they feel safe in school. One child told me, 'The teachers are really caring and there is always someone to talk to.'

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed to look at the effectiveness of safeguarding, how effectively you have improved the teaching of writing and, in particular, how you have improved the progress of boys, disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils in writing.
- In 2016, the proportion of pupils who were making better than expected progress in writing was below the national average. Leaders reorganised the writing curriculum and raised expectations among staff. This led to pupils, particularly the boys, making better progress because teachers have higher expectations.
- Disadvantaged pupils are achieving well. Leaders have established a clear strategy to ensure that all interventions have a sharp focus, and this has helped develop pupils' confidence. For example, the 'learning achievement base' is a nurturing environment that ensures that all children are prepared to learn. This extra support is effective, and it is helping pupils to build up their confidence and become successful learners. Your staff monitor pupils' progress and well-being closely, and your records show the vast majority of disadvantaged pupils are making good progress.
- Pupils make good progress in writing but it is not as strong as in mathematics and reading. You have implemented changes to the teaching of writing. Teachers have developed the range of writing experiences that help pupils to develop their descriptive vocabulary. Most-able pupils are challenged to use complex sentences to relate emotions and feeling in stories. Where these changes have been

implemented effectively, the most able pupils are making better progress. You have identified that these changes are not yet consistent across the school. Consequently, not all the most able pupils in the school make as much progress as they could.

- You and your team have worked hard to improve pupils' attendance and it is now in line with the national average. However, you know that attendance needs to improve further. The number of pupils who are persistently absent is higher than the national average and you have correctly identified this as a key area to focus in on. Your staff continue to communicate sensitively with families to ensure that pupils attend school and maximise their time at school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress in writing continues to improve, particularly for the most able
- absence continues to be robustly tackled so that current attendance levels are sustained and the number of children who are persistently absent reduces.

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

Yours sincerely

David Harris
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your deputy headteacher and your staff. We talked about the improvements which have been made since the last inspection. Together, we undertook observations of learning in lessons. I examined pupils' work, focusing on writing. I also held discussions with two governors, including the chair of governors, and talked informally to pupils in lessons. A meeting was held with a representative from the local authority. Before the inspection, I examined a variety of documents, including the school's website, published performance data and a summary of your school's self-evaluation document. I took into account the views of eight parents who responded to 'Parent View' and the feedback from 22 staff questionnaires. A range of documentary evidence was evaluated, including documents relating to safeguarding and governance.