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Mr Barrie O'Shea
Headteacher
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Dear Mr O'Shea

Short inspection of Duncombe Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 14 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 was judged to be good in October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

This is a school where academic, sporting and creative achievements are celebrated. Your vision of 'lifelong learning and celebration' is made a reality by the strong relationships across the school between parents, pupils, staff and governors. Staff, parent and pupil questionnaires are overwhelmingly positive. You provide a wide range of breakfast, after-school and holiday activities as well as a thriving Saturday school for your pupils. In addition, you provide many regular support groups and learning activities for parents. This ensures that the school community feels valued and included. Parents are very keen to work with you, to improve the academic achievement and life chances for their children.

Effective governance provides you with both challenge and support. Governors know the school well and are informed fully about the many strengths as well as the challenges you face. Recently, they have overseen the planning and successful completion of new facilities for two-year-old children, which opened in September 2017. They have also invested in the training and development of staff through successful collaboration with the University of East London. This allows all teachers to have the opportunity to work towards a master's degree and is having a significant impact on improving their skills and practice.

Since 2016, pupils' attainment has improved. In 2017, Year 6 pupils achieved

average standards in mathematics, reading and writing. There was also an increase in the number of pupils working at the higher level, in mathematics and reading. However, progress in reading and writing was well below the national averages this year, resulting in several pupils not achieving standards that they were expected to reach. You have already put in place a number of strategies to address this.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leaders have ensured the safety and well-being of pupils is given the highest priority. You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. The record of pre-employment checks on the suitability of staff to work with children meets statutory requirements. Staff are given a thorough induction and training in safeguarding when they start and know what to do, should they have any concern about a child. Your senior leaders deal swiftly and effectively with any safeguarding concerns that may arise.

The staff team discusses possible safeguarding scenarios in their regular staff meetings. This is to ensure that the safety and well-being of the pupils at Duncombe are at the forefront of their minds. Pupils I spoke with say that they feel safe in the school.

Inspection findings

- We first agreed to look at pupils' progress in reading. Although the picture of attainment is improving, the progress of some pupils was well below average in 2017. You attribute this to the increased difficulty of the new reading tests, for pupils who were previously just on the borderline of national averages. You provided a range of information about specific pupils with some justifiable reasons for their outcomes. Nevertheless, you also agreed that progress could have been tracked more systematically so that support could be targeted more swiftly.
- You have introduced a range of reading programmes and effective strategies, which are accelerating progress and starting to have considerable impact. You showed me how progress is now tracked at an individual level, with teachers presenting their records of pupils' progress to leaders every half term. This has ensured that pupils quickly receive the help they need to improve their reading skills. The school's information shows that pupils are now making faster progress in their reading.
- The introduction of more meaningful texts for pupils is enabling children to develop a real love of, and enthusiasm for, reading.
- We then looked at Year 1 phonics. In 2017, the proportion of pupils who reached the required standard in the national phonics screening check dipped significantly from the previous year. You have since provided up-to-date training in phonics for all staff. Pupils who had previously not reached a good level of development in literacy at the end of Reception year are being monitored and tracked regularly to ensure that their progress is accelerated. The phonics sessions I observed were well planned and pupils engaged well with the interesting activities. However, we

agreed that the most able pupils should be provided with more challenging work during these sessions to ensure that they achieve the highest standards.

- We then checked the effectiveness of actions taken to improve pupils' writing. Since 2016, you and senior leaders have made significant adjustments to the wider curriculum. The introduction of deeper and more engaging texts for reading are also providing extended opportunities for writing across the curriculum, for example in history and geography. This is reinforcing learning, enriching language and increasing vocabulary across subjects, and encouraging the more reluctant writers. These strategies are ensuring that pupils make faster gains in their writing skills. Scrutiny of books during the inspection showed that pupils' writing had improved over time and across a variety of subjects.
- Finally, we looked at the provision for children in the early years, and in particular, the new provision for two-year-olds. You provide a vibrant, safe and happy learning environment for the children. Standards have remained consistent with just under two thirds of children achieving a good level of development for their age by the time they leave Reception. However, you are aware that this needs to improve so that more pupils achieve national averages by the end of key stage 1. This year, you have prioritised staff training to implement more effective strategies for the teaching of speaking and listening skills. This has resulted in a 10% increase in the number of children who have achieved a good level of development for their age in language and communication.
- You have identified correctly, that fine and gross motor skills are underdeveloped in some of the children. This is often the case for children whose families cannot support them to draw and write at home and who may not have easy access to an outside play area. You provide many activities and resources to address this, both inside the classroom and in the outdoor provision. However, the prime area that holds the children back is literacy and numeracy. You accept that there are not enough activities that take place outside to encourage children to write, count and to solve problems in a range of contexts.
- You have introduced an effective assessment system, which is supporting you in being able to identify where the children are in their learning and development and what the next steps should be. This is already having a positive impact and is supporting the early years leader in ensuring that teachers provide each child with the right activities to move them forward.
- The two-year-old provision is a rich and vibrant learning environment, well resourced and staffed. It is bright and airy with up-to-date facilities and equipment. The children have settled in well and were actively engaged and learning. Governors are committed to supporting this provision. They are aware of the research which indicates the educational benefits of early education. They hope that because of this great start the children will do well academically in the future. All safeguarding requirements are met in the early years.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils make good or better progress by ensuring that robust tracking identifies pupils who are falling behind so that support can be implemented swiftly
- the outdoor area in the early years is rich in resources and activities so that children make faster progress in their literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Ladipo
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your senior leaders and three governors, including the chair. I met with the head of school improvement for Islington. I spoke to pupils in classrooms and around the school. I heard pupils from Year 2 and Year 6 read. I looked at a sample of pupils' work in books and took account of the school's information about standards and progress. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the school development plan, the school's self-evaluation, action plans and safeguarding information and records. I took account of 42 staff responses, 37 pupil responses as well as 36 responses to the online survey Parent View.