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Mr Peter Strauss
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Strauss

Short inspection of Middleton Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained and built on the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There have been improvements in many areas because leaders have had an effective focus on the quality of teaching. For example, the teachers use questions in a well-structured way. In the early years, the proportion of children now reaching a good level of development is above the national average and a higher-than-average proportion of pupils reach the expected level in the Year 1 national phonics screening check. Reading is a strength throughout the school. Pupils are predominantly happy.

Leaders and governors continue to be ambitious and want pupils to reach even higher standards in the future. In this, they are well supported by teachers and other adults, who are proud to work at your school. Teachers are genuinely committed to developing their teaching skills and to maintaining the very good quality of care for pupils. Many parents recognise the improvements in communications between home and school. As one said, for example, 'The school uses a good range of methods to keep parents up to date – there is no reason not to know what is going on.'

Pupils are proud of their school. Older pupils speak eloquently about how they are supported to learn and how much they love the school. The 'UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools Award' provides a strong pillar for the school's ethos and is used to develop respectful pupils who assert their rights and responsibilities with

confidence. The pupils know their views will be heard in this school. They speak enthusiastically about the varied and exciting curriculum and activities, such as school trips, past and future, locally and even to China. Parents appreciate this well-rounded experience and comment that the range of opportunities available is stunning and has really added to the pupils' experiences.

One parent said, 'The school feels like a big part of our lives, not just the place where my child goes to get an education.' Families have a wide range of backgrounds, but they are all able to get involved in the life of the school, at a recent Bonfire Night event, for example. You made the decision not to hold staged open days, but to simply open the school's doors to show prospective parents around. This indicates the confidence of school leaders that pupils' behaviour will be exemplary. My experience today suggests that you are right to have such confidence.

The approaches used by the staff to support pupils who may be vulnerable, or face barriers to their learning, are effective. For example, the staff make a conscious effort to use 'enhanced feedback' when pupils find learning something difficult. This means that the teacher is provided with additional time with the child to help them understand and move on. Attendance is above average, but leaders keep a careful eye on the potentially most vulnerable pupils to make sure that they are in school.

Governors know the school well because of their frequent visits to it and their understanding of the high-quality evaluation reports provided by you and other leaders. They have made a strong contribution to the improvements in recent years and they are equally ambitious that the school continues to thrive in the future. Their considered approach to the monitoring of school improvement is a strength.

Leaders and governors are aware of what they need to do for the school to improve. Pupils' writing in key stage 2 has not yet reached the same standard as in reading and mathematics overall. Current school plans identify this as a priority alongside others, such as reducing differences between boys' and girls' attainment, and between the lower-attaining pupils' and others' progress, while maintaining a successful school culture through the school's forthcoming expansion.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have detailed knowledge of pupils in the school and the difficulties that some of them face. As the school's designated safeguarding officer, you have ensured that staff are trained and know what to do, if they have a concern. Recruitment procedures are secure. Policy and practice take account of the most-recent legislation. You ensure that safeguarding records are up to date and detailed and you take decisive and persistent action, when necessary, to ensure that each individual child is protected. You work effectively with other agencies.

Pupils' conduct, care and respect for each other play a significant part in their feelings of safety when in school. They have been taught to support and to value each other and they say that name-calling is almost unheard of and dealt with

quickly. Outside of school, they can draw on their learning, for example about road and e-safety. In summary, the leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Inspection findings

- First, I looked at what leaders are doing to improve the progress made by key stage 2 pupils in their writing. Plans are already in place to improve the pupils' writing. A newly appointed English leader has identified that teachers' assessments may have been overly cautious in the past. Pupils' writing in their books and in displays is of a good standard, supporting this view. The teaching of writing is highly structured and precise. This has led to common features, such as well-formed handwriting, accurate spelling and punctuation, and demonstrable progress in books.
- Pupils explain how they are helped to improve and that they value the structured approach, the use of checklists and the extra help which they can have, if they need it. The pupils get some opportunities half-termly to write extended pieces of work without teachers' guidance. It is not evident in books or lessons that pupils have many opportunities to develop their own writing fully using a range of styles and in different contexts, limiting their ability to reach the highest standards. Pupils say that they are always helped if they need it. While this is a strength for most pupils, the most skilled writers lack opportunities to develop individuality and resilience in their writing.
- Second, I looked at how well leaders were ensuring that lower-attaining pupils make good progress in key stage 2 mathematics. A new approach to the teaching and learning of mathematics was introduced just over two years ago. Older pupils say that they prefer it and explain differences in how they are taught. Progress in mathematics is good overall because the learning is suitably demanding.
- Leaders had noticed that pupils with low prior attainment did not make such good progress in mathematics. In addition to the new teaching approach, you put in place extra strategies to make sure that pupils who find mathematics difficult can be provided quickly with extra help when they need it. Examples include pre-teaching sessions every Monday, additional time in small groups, information cards for parents, and skilful analysis of information about pupils' progress. This has not yet shown any impact on key stage 2 tests.
- Finally, I considered how well leaders were using additional funding grants and other strategies to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. A year ago, after noticing that the attendance of some disadvantaged pupils, or those who have SEN, was lower than others', leaders introduced targeted strategies to work with families. As a result, the difference has now all but disappeared.
- Attendance remains high overall. Even when pupils have particular reasons for extended time away from school, for example medical reasons, school leaders ensure that there is individualised support for learning, including on occasion holding meetings in hospital. Parents know that they should make medical

appointments outside of the school day wherever possible. Leaders challenge the very small number of families who have taken holidays in term-time.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they enhance and extend the already successful strategies used to improve the progress pupils make in writing in key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanne Ward
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I considered evidence from a range of sources, including the previous inspection report and information about the pupils' performance in 2015, 2016 and 2017. I also reviewed the school's website and read published policies. I spoke with parents, pupils, school staff, leaders, governors and the school improvement adviser. I considered written responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, and other surveys of parents, pupils, and staff. I looked at a range of documentation, including: the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans; the single central record of the checks on staff and volunteers; a sample of recruitment information; records of staff training; minutes of the meetings of the governing body and visit reports; and records of actions taken to protect children's welfare. I made visits to lessons to look at teaching and learning in the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2. I also looked at work in pupils' books and pupils explained to me how they are learning. I looked at information about the progress made by pupils. I heard a poem performed by representatives from the 'UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools Award' working group.