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Miss Kim Heng
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Heng

Short inspection of Hall Green Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 1 February 2018, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Despite the demolition of the old school and the construction of a new one, you have not let the building work detract from your core purpose of leading learning. You and the deputy headteacher are an effective team that lead the school very well. You provide ambitious leadership and work hard with other leaders to keep everyone's expectations of what pupils can achieve high. Your steely determination to ensure that all pupils strive to make the best possible progress, regardless of the challenges some face, is evident in everything you do. As a consequence, teaching remains strong and leads to good and improving outcomes for pupils.

There is an absolute 'no excuses' culture at Hall Green. Whatever obstacles pupils may encounter in their learning, you and the staff look for ways round them so they succeed. Perseverance and the sheer hard work of leaders and staff are in plentiful supply. To that end, you are never satisfied that you have done enough and strive to do even more. This has led to some impressive improvements in pupils' achievement over time. In 2017, key stage 2 progress rates were well above national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. Similarly, the proportion of pupils passing the Year 1 phonics screening check has improved year on year and in 2017 matched the national average. Nonetheless, you recognise that there is still some work to do to ensure that more pupils attain the higher standards, particularly in writing.

You keep a close eye on the quality of teaching and provide guidance to teachers, proportionate to need. This support, combined with sharing good practice, results in better teaching across the school. Classrooms are hives of activity where pupils are engaged in thought-provoking learning tasks, sharing their ideas with others and deepening their understanding. Teachers use resources well to enthuse pupils. For example, in Year 6, pupils excitedly used technology confidently to create short videos during a writing lesson on formal and informal language. This helped them to reflect on and improve their work.

Pupils behave exceptionally well in and out of lessons. They are proud of their school, and talk with enthusiasm and interest about their learning experiences. 'Our school's phenomenal' was one pupil's description of their school; many others' comments were of a similar vein. Without exception, every pupil spoke with great positivity about their learning, their teachers and school leaders. One pupil summed up, very clearly, your commitment to improving pupils' life chances: 'Miss Heng helps people out because she wants a better life for them.'

You have made good progress with the areas for improvement that inspectors left you with at the time of the previous inspection. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined at the end of key stage 2 is now almost in line with the national average. Leaders' improvement plans are closely aligned to securing improved outcomes for pupils. You are currently developing the leadership capacity of middle leaders, although you acknowledge that there is further work to do. Governors carry out their roles and responsibilities appropriately, maintaining a careful oversight of the school's work.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils are kept very safe because leaders ensure that safeguarding is at the forefront of everyone's mind. Leaders have created an ethos of vigilance where the safety and well-being of pupils is paramount. The school is rigorous in its follow up to any referrals to outside agencies, to make certain that pupils are protected from harm. Staff are knowledgeable about the many aspects of safeguarding because leaders make sure that staff training is updated frequently and matched well to the unique context of the school. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Staff recruitment is robust. Leaders make all the necessary checks to satisfy themselves that prospective staff are suitable to work with children. Governors play a key role in overseeing this, periodically checking the school's single central record.

Pupils are taught effectively about different aspects of safeguarding so they can stay safe and make informed choices as they get older. Pupils reported that bullying is rare, and that when it does occur, staff or 'buddies' – specially trained key stage 2 pupils – can help resolve it. They said that they feel safe in school and are well cared for by adults.

Inspection findings

- Pupils' attendance, while gradually improving, remains below the national average. There have been some marginal improvements in reducing pupils' rates of persistent absence, although the figures are still very high when compared to national figures. However, leaders take every available course of action to combat poor attendance. They track pupils' attendance methodically and take early action if it begins to dip. There are also many incentives to reward good attendance. Conversely, letters to alert parents and carers that attendance is a concern, home visits and court action are all used to remind parents of their responsibility to ensure that children attend school regularly. Despite this, some parents still deny their children a right to good education.
- Clear, direct teaching of writing enables most pupils to make good progress. Teachers ensure a good balance in the writing curriculum between the development of skills and a focus on the content and purpose of writing. Discussion work is used very well to help pupils develop their ideas and plan for a writing task. However, teachers do not consistently teach pupils to develop a neat, joined style of handwriting at an early enough stage.
- Pupils write confidently for a wide range of purposes across the curriculum. For example, a Reception pupil engaged in a 'doctor's surgery' role play examined me using his stethoscope, informed me I was 'very sick', then promptly wrote and issued me with a prescription! Boys and girls, equally, enjoy writing. However, more girls than boys typically attain the higher standards in writing by the end of key stages 1 and 2. You are aware of this and have already put in place plans to address this gap in achievement.
- Sometimes, teachers do not provide sufficient advice and guidance to the most able pupils on how to improve their writing. In addition, pupils are not regularly given enough opportunities to edit and improve their writing. This is hampering their progress and reducing their chances of attaining higher standards.
- The rich, varied and balanced curriculum is a growing strength of the school. The curriculum contributes particularly well to the development of pupils' literacy skills. Teachers plan interesting topics, which capture the pupils' imagination and encourage them to achieve.
- There are relatively new arrangements for subject leaders in place. The newly established team is committed and enthusiastic. Subject leaders are keen to drive forward an exciting, broad curriculum. They have already begun to find out what is working well and what could be improved in their subject areas. Firm plans are in place to enhance the quality of teaching across all subjects.
- Middle leaders are provided with appropriate training and guidance to enable them to undertake their roles effectively. They feel empowered and trusted by leaders to make decisions. However, currently, the changes they have implemented have not had enough time to embed.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide specific guidance to pupils, particularly the most able pupils, on how to edit and improve their written work successfully
- all pupils are taught to develop a neat, joined style of handwriting as soon as they can form letters accurately
- middle leaders further develop their leadership roles so they have a wider impact on raising achievement across the school
- they continue to take strident action when parents fail in their duty to send children to school regularly.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim Hill
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the deputy headteacher to discuss the school's self-evaluation and its current priorities. I also met with governors, including the chair of the governing body, middle leaders and a member of staff with responsibility for safeguarding. I considered the responses of parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the 10 free-text comments. I also spoke to some parents at the end of the day. I took into account responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff and pupils. We observed learning together in all year groups. I reviewed a large sample of pupils' work, focusing mainly on writing and topic books. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and on the playground. I spoke with many pupils informally to capture their views on school. I scrutinised a wide range of documents including the school's development plan, its self-evaluation, governors' documentation and safeguarding information. I also examined the school's website.