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8 February 2018

Miss Sally Hayden
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Dear Miss Hayden

Short inspection of The Hall School

Following my visit to the school on 25 January 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 February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since becoming headteacher last September, you have quickly won the support and confidence of staff, pupils, parents and carers. Parents were delighted by your appointment, not least because of your long-standing work as the school's deputy headteacher.

You and your staff are rightly proud of the school's many strengths. The pupils love coming to school. One Year 6 pupil, typifying the views of her classmates, said, 'The worst part about being in Year 6 is knowing we have to leave at the end of the year.' The pupils are happy and safe and their attendance is consistently high. Pupils' excellent behaviour makes a strong contribution to their learning. It also contributes to the lovely, welcoming atmosphere that permeates the school. During the inspection, I lost count of the number of pupils who approached me, introduced themselves and wished me a 'good morning' or a 'good afternoon'. The most confident pupils were also keen to shake my hand.

The school continues to provide a curriculum which enriches the whole child. The well-trained subject leaders ensure that their pupils learn well in subjects across the national curriculum. The school environment is enhanced by pupils' excellent work, for example in history, geography and religious education. Provision for music and the arts is strong and the curriculum is enhanced by a

wide range of additional clubs and visits, including to diverse places of worship. Pupils were keen to tell me about how they are building their resilience as a result of the school's work to enhance this aspect of their personal development and well-being this year.

Your evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is accurate and is helping to drive improvements to the areas which you know need further attention. You have refined the school's approach to the monitoring of teaching, for example, by ensuring that:

- teaching is observed more frequently than before
- the scrutiny of pupils' work focuses more sharply on those pupils at risk of underachieving
- staff are challenged more precisely about the impact of their work to raise the achievement of different groups of pupils.

The staff told me that they welcome this increased rigour and focus because it means that they are really clear about what you expect from them. They share your determination to bring about improvements to pupils' achievements where they are needed. They also value the way in which you have strengthened the school's performance-management arrangements to ensure that teachers' targets are genuinely developmental, are linked to the school's priorities, inform training and are revisited regularly. One teacher told me, 'I have never before had my professional development folder out so much as this year!'

Since the last inspection, children's achievements by the end of the early years have improved considerably. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year has risen from being well below average to average. Children's achievements in reading, writing and mathematics are much better than at the time of the last inspection. From their different starting points, the children make good progress throughout their time in the early years, including those who learn in the pre-school. Pupils continue to achieve well in phonics and standards by the end of key stage 1 have been in line with or above the national average for the past two years.

You and your staff are rightly focusing attention on improving pupils' achievements by the end of key stage 2. You know that, since the last inspection, pupils' attainment and progress by the end of key stage 2 have not been as consistent as in key stage 1 when compared to other pupils nationally. The most able pupils have not all achieved well enough in reading and mathematics and disadvantaged pupils' progress has been mixed by the end of Year 6. The evidence gathered from this inspection shows that the work you and your staff are doing to remedy these weaker aspects of teaching, learning and assessment is beginning to make a difference.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders have ensured that pupils learn in an atmosphere where they feel very safe and secure. The pupils have absolute confidence in the willingness of their teachers to deal with any worries they may have quickly and effectively. Pupils know that they must treat others in the school kindly and courteously. They report that bullying is very rare but always dealt with. The Year 4 pupils were keen to tell me about the poster the school council produced during anti-bullying week, which declared 'no bullies in our school!'

Pupils are well informed about how to avoid potential dangers, for example when they are using computers or playing out in the school holidays. The school makes good use of other professionals, such as police community support officers and firefighters, to keep pupils alert to potential dangers.

Staff are well trained in child protection and readily refer any concerns they have about a pupil's welfare to the designated safeguarding lead. The staff responsible work well with external agencies to ensure that any pupils known to be vulnerable to harm receive the support and care they need. Procedures to check on the suitability of staff to work with children fully meet requirements.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain whether the school remains good, I investigated key aspects of the school's work where past performance information, though broadly average, indicated some inconsistencies.
- Firstly, I explored the effectiveness of the school's use of pupil premium funding, particularly for pupils in key stage 2. This is because, in the last two years, the disadvantaged pupils in the school have achieved less well than other pupils nationally. The school's published strategy for its use of the pupil premium does not currently meet the requirements set out by the Department for Education.
- The inspection found that staff are working effectively to improve outcomes for this group of pupils. Senior leaders have ensured that staff understand pupils' individual barriers to learning and how best to overcome them. All staff are fully aware of their duty to ensure that disadvantaged pupils achieve at least as well as their peers. In their meetings with senior staff, class teachers and middle leaders are constantly challenged about the progress this group of pupils is making.
- While the school's published statement on the use of pupil premium funding is weak, the regular reports to governors on the achievements of this group of pupils are of good quality. The minutes of meetings of the governing body show that governors regularly challenge senior leaders about the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. They receive good-quality information about the impact of different initiatives and ensure that spending decisions are rooted in evidence about what works. My scrutiny of pupils' work during the inspection

confirmed the school's own analysis that this group of pupils is achieving much better than in the past.

- I also explored the effectiveness of the school's strategies to raise achievement in mathematics by the end of key stage 2, particularly for the most able pupils. Much work is being done to improve the quality of mathematics teaching across the school. Careful analysis of pupils' work revealed that many were being held back by their lack of skills and confidence in using mathematical reasoning. This has led to key changes being made to the curriculum and the way in which teachers teach mathematics. Pupils are now routinely given opportunities to reason for themselves, using a range of practical resources, and to explain their reasoning to others.
- Teachers are increasingly skilled at asking searching questions which sharpen pupils' thinking or highlight their misconceptions. The pupils I spoke to during the inspection, including the most able pupils, all told me that mathematics lessons were now more challenging, more fun and more effective. The school's assessment information shows that all groups of pupils are achieving considerably better than before in mathematics, including the most able pupils.
- I also checked whether the school was taking effective action to raise achievement in reading and writing by the end of key stage 2, particularly for groups of pupils who, in the past, have not achieved as well as others. Last year, for example, lower-attaining pupils achieved less well than others in writing.
- The school's self-evaluation, development plan and the minutes of meetings of the governing body show clearly that areas of previous inconsistency are being tackled vigorously across the school. In discussion, staff spoke with great precision about, for example, how their own skills in assessing pupils' progress in reading and writing had improved. They explained how this had helped them to have a better understanding of pupils' strengths and weaknesses in these subjects. In lessons observed, pupils were seen to be achieving well in areas where previously they have struggled, for example in correcting and proofreading their work accurately. My scrutiny of the books of lower-attaining writers showed marked improvements this year in the length, accuracy, neatness and quality of their written work. As in mathematics, evidence from the inspection, including from the school's assessment information, shows that outcomes in reading and writing are improving quickly this year, including for the most able pupils and disadvantaged pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' achievements continue to rise by the end of key stage 2 by:
 - continuing to monitor closely the impact of strategies to improve the quality of teaching in mathematics
 - maintaining the strong focus on ensuring that all groups of pupils achieve

as well as they can in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2, particularly disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils

- the school's published strategy on its use of the pupil premium fully meets requirements.

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

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and other leaders and a group of teachers and learning support assistants. I spoke with parents at the start of the school day and with pupils in meetings and as they greeted me around the school. I observed teaching with you in the pre-school, the Reception class and Years 3, 5 and 6. I scrutinised the work of a range of pupils.

I reviewed a range of other information, including the school's child protection policy, the single central record of employment checks, the school's self-evaluation and development plan, pupils' assessment and progress information and minutes of the meetings of the governing body. I looked at the school's website, including the published strategy on the school's use of the pupil premium. I also considered the results of Parent View and your own surveys of parents' views.