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Mrs Nikki Miller
Headteacher
Blanford Mere Primary School
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Dear Mrs Miller

Short inspection of Blanford Mere Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 24 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 October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

Since the last inspection, you and your staff have worked hard to maintain the good standard of education at Blanford Mere Primary School. You and the deputy headteacher, diligently review practice and analyse outcomes to ensure that pupils receive a good education. You have correctly identified priorities for improvement and you have put in place a wide range of actions to address these. You set high expectations and focus on consistency of teaching and learning, which ensures that all pupils make good progress.

Teaching is good across the school because you have put learning at the heart of the school. Teachers regularly share good practice and talk about what works well. They appreciate the high-quality training and support they receive. They value the opportunities to work with teachers from other schools through the partnerships you have formed with other local primary schools.

Pupils' behaviour is good. Pupils are confident and effective learners who love school and love learning. One pupil commented: 'I love learning and I love a challenge.' You and your staff have fostered a culture where pupils feel safe to learn from their mistakes. One pupil said: 'We know that everybody makes mistakes – that's how we learn.'

During the inspection I looked at whether the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been addressed. It is clear you have ensured that pupils are set more challenging targets and that all pupils extend and develop their core skills through applying them consistently in all subjects.

The curriculum is well-planned to ensure that all subjects are covered in sufficient depth, particularly in mixed-age classes. There are links to each subject area through topics. For example, in a recent topic on the Victorians, pupils studied famous historical figures from Victorian times, looked at the design of the famous bridge at Ironbridge and learned about iron smelting, all linked to the heritage of the local area through a visit to the Blists Hill Museum. Pupils talk confidently and enthusiastically about their learning, demonstrating impressive knowledge and understanding of the history of the area.

Pupils enjoy rich experiences on trips and visits. Their enjoyment of music and singing is celebrated in assemblies. Classes perform short plays based on their curriculum topics such as the ancient Greeks.

Pupils have a thorough understanding of democracy and fundamental British values. They know the name of their local MP, how he was elected, what happens in Parliament and why democracy is important. One pupil made an impressive model at home of both the Houses of Parliament, which is on display in the school reception.

The school has achieved the UNICEF Rights Respecting School Award and is working towards the next level. Pupils know they have a right to an education and value this right. The UNICEF principles underpin the behaviour policy and each class has their own charter.

Blanford Mere is a caring and inclusive school. You explained how pupils with a range of needs have been welcomed into Blanford Mere and become confident learners. Staff work hard to build good relationships with parents and carers. One parent commented: 'Staff are kind, hard-working and diligent so as to ensure that their teaching has a positive impact on my child's learning outcomes.' Parents I spoke to agreed that they find staff approachable and supportive.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have established a strong culture of safeguarding in the school, where all staff are trained to spot the signs of neglect or abuse. Staff know what to do if they have any concerns.

As designated lead for safeguarding you carry out this responsibility with tenacity and care. As a result, children receive the support they need promptly, which ensures that they are safe, ready to learn and eager to come to school. You know your children and their families well. Parents and carers appreciate the support you and your team provide for their children. As one parent commented: 'The staff go over and above enabling children to reach their potential, focusing on the whole child not just their academic progress.'

Pupils feel safe in school and know how to keep themselves safe. They are supportive of each other and many act as peer mentors, providing support to pupils

who need it. Parents unanimously say they feel their children are safe in school.

Inspection findings

At the beginning of the inspection, we discussed your evaluation of the school and the many school improvement activities already in place. We discussed how you might add milestones to your plans and agreed to focus on four key aspects: standards in KS1; progress in writing, particularly at key stage 2; achievement in curriculum subjects other than English and mathematics, particularly science; safeguarding and attendance.

- In 2017, standards at the end of key stage 1 were below national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. Your analysis of the reasons for this shows that a small number of pupils in this year group had low attendance and several pupils joined the school during Years 1 and 2. For those pupils who joined the school at the start of Reception and who attended regularly, a higher proportion achieved the expected standard and made good progress.
- For pupils who are now in Year 3, the most recent assessment information indicates they are making good progress, with a high proportion of pupils in line to achieve at the expected standard for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. The work in pupils' books confirmed this.
- Assessment information for pupils currently in key stage 1 indicates that they are making good progress. A high proportion are in line to achieve at the standard expected nationally by the end of key stage 1, with many more pupils achieving greater depth in writing. Work in pupils' books and the lessons we observed supported these judgements.
- In 2017, pupils' progress in writing at the end of key stage 2 was below the national average and below that achieved in reading and mathematics. Following your analysis of the results, you have put in place a range of strategies to improve the teaching of writing, which are starting to show an impact.
- Teachers have benefited from extensive training to improve the teaching of writing. They now model good writing and draw upon good examples in pupils' work. In one lesson, the teacher read out a pupils' writing to illustrate effective use of personification. Classroom displays remind pupils of the strategies they can use to improve their writing. Work in pupils' books and discussions with pupils demonstrate the positive impact this approach is having on improving pupils' writing.
- Teachers now have consistent, high expectations of handwriting and presentation of pupils' work across the school. While it is clear that some pupils still need to focus on improving their handwriting, in the main, handwriting and presentation have improved since the beginning of this academic year as a result of this strategy.
- In 2017, at the end of key stage 1, standards in science were below the national average. However, standards in science across the school are improving as a result of raised expectations and focused activities to raise the profile of science. Scientific questions are displayed across the school, encouraging pupils to think

like a scientist. Displays around the school demonstrate pupils' learning in science. For example, for 'catch me being a scientist' month, pupils were asked to carry out an investigation on a science topic of their choice at home. Their projects ranged from fossil hunting to growing plants from seeds. Pupils talk knowledgably about their learning in science and work in pupils' books demonstrates deep coverage of this curriculum area.

- We looked at the most recent attendance figures. For a small minority of pupils, low attendance is a persistent issue. However, attendance is improving as a result of rigorous monitoring and the support parents and pupils receive to overcome barriers to attending school. For example, some of your pupils are affected by medical conditions and you do all you can to accommodate their needs. Your school has achieved an official award for 'Good Diabetes Care in School'.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- standards and progress in writing across the school continue to improve by maintaining a strong focus on activities that will help pupils to write well at greater depth
- the evaluation of the impact of school improvement activities is even more tightly focused on improving standards and progress rapidly.

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

Yours sincerely

Jane Spilsbury
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher and other school staff, including the subject leader for English and the school business manager. I met with the vice-chair of the governing body, who is also the chair of the school improvement committee. I spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day and took account of 23 responses on Parent View. I also met with a small group of staff at the end of the school day.

I scrutinised a wide range of school documents including the single central record, your school self-evaluation and your school improvement plan. In addition, I looked

at records for child protection cases and your analysis of attendance and behaviour incidents.

I visited every classroom with you and looked particularly at pupils' written work. I spoke to pupils about their learning and whether they feel safe. I also observed their behaviour at breaktime, in the before- and after-school provision and in lessons. I met with a small group of pupils from Years 5 and 6.