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Mrs Bainbridge
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Bainbridge

Short inspection of Maple Tree Lower School

Following my visit to the school on 8 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 May 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Maple Tree Lower has maintained the strong focus on developing pupils' academic and social skills identified at the last inspection. Parents and carers are unanimous in their support of the school. This is evident in the many positive comments made in Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. Parents wrote about the 'wonderful school and how staff 'genuinely care about [pupils'] well-being alongside their academic achievements'.

Strong leadership, including that of governors, has ensured that the school's focus on improvement does not falter. You and your leadership team have a very clear vision of success and this is communicated successfully to staff. The local authority has provided very effective support, which you rightly appreciate, and this has informed the speed with which you have led improvements.

Governance at Maple Tree Lower is highly effective. The governing body is well led, ensuring clear challenge. Drawing on a breadth of professional expertise, the governing body is able to support the school's robust approach to safeguarding. Governors regularly visit the school, gathering critical information with which to ask pertinent questions and commend the school on its successes.

Pupils behave very well, both in class and around the school. As a result, pupils learn in a calm, supportive environment. Teachers have high expectations which pupils respond to very well. They are attentive and enthusiastic learners. You have ensured that pupils have the opportunities afforded by a well-balanced, rounded curriculum. Pupils study a

range of subjects such as geography, history, art and science. As a consequence, pupils develop strong understanding of the world they live in and respect for other cultures and faiths. Pupils are prepared well to become citizens of 21st century Britain.

You correctly judge early years provision to be a strength of the school. Through effective, focused leadership, children make strong progress from pre-school through to Nursery and then Reception. The curriculum is carefully structured to ensure that children's skills develop sequentially throughout early years.

You recognise that there are still areas for school improvement. You accept that teaching, learning and assessment need to be more consistently challenging across the wider curriculum to ensure that a greater proportion of pupils make rapid progress. You also acknowledge that, although pupils develop strong phonics skills, they do not consistently develop strong critical reading skills.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils appreciate the ways in which staff ensure their safety and emotional well-being. Pupils learn about how to keep safe on the internet and were able to tell me why it was important to do so. All parents and staff who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaires are adamant that pupils are safe at the school. One parent's comment that they were 'confident' that their child was 'well looked after' was echoed by many others.

Pupils understand what bullying is and how it manifests itself. They told me that bullying was not a common occurrence and that staff are quick to resolve any issues.

Leaders, including governors, ensure that safeguarding arrangements are stringent and meticulously followed. Records, including the checks on adults who work at the school, are carefully maintained and regularly reviewed. Safeguarding leaders are vigilant and ensure that vulnerable pupils receive the support they require, in a timely and appropriate manner.

Adults receive regular safeguarding training. They follow the school's approach ensuring that referrals are clearly recorded and made as soon as a concern is raised. They are then rigorously followed up if necessary.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain that the school remains good, one of my key lines of enquiry was about the breadth and richness of the curriculum. The previous inspection report raised the importance of improving the quality of guidance for pupils in all subject areas. Inspection evidence demonstrates that teachers provide pupils with clear guidance to support their progress in most areas of the curriculum, including history, geography, science and art.
- Pupils at Maple Tree Lower have a range of opportunities to extend their understanding of many subjects. For example, in art, pupils study and emulate the work of artists such as Mondrian and Kandinsky. Pupils told me how much they enjoy art. Pupils receive specialist teaching in physical education (PE) to develop both their

physical fitness and their understanding of how to lead healthy lives. Pupils develop their critical reading, writing and mathematics skills through the study of other subjects such as history, geography and science. As a result, pupils enjoy coming to school and are eager to learn.

- Pupils appreciate opportunities to deepen their knowledge and skills of specific subjects through trips to museums and art galleries. Additionally, pupils speak animatedly about the opportunities afforded by the concentrated study of a subject such as science for an entire week. Pupils told me how they enjoy the processes of hypothesising, testing and experimenting through experiments in science. As a result, pupils attained above the national average in science in both 2016 and 2017.
- My second line of enquiry was about how well pupils with differing starting points make sustained progress over time. This was because 2016 and 2017 key stage 1 results show that pupils' progress was in line with the national average in reading and writing. Achievements in mathematics at key stage 1 were below average in 2016 and in line with the national average in 2017. However, the proportion of pupils who achieved the higher standard in reading and writing was below the national average in both 2016 and 2017. Observations of lessons and scrutiny of current pupils' work demonstrates that pupils are now making good, sustained progress in most areas of the curriculum.
- With effective support from the local authority, the school has made substantial changes to the ways in which it tracks and monitors pupils' progress. Senior leaders, key stage and subject leaders work together to identify ways in which additional support can be provided if necessary. In addition, the governing body has a strong understanding of pupils' assessment data and holds the school to account for pupils' progress. As a result, pupils, including pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are making good progress.
- Pupils do not, however, consistently receive additional challenge in their work. For example, teachers do not stretch and extend pupils' knowledge in reading and mathematics. As a consequence, pupils do not always make the progress of which they are capable. Pupils have access to a range of resources in mathematics to support their ability to understand complex ideas but teachers do not consistently provide them with extension tasks.
- I also sought to establish how well leaders ensure that children make good progress in the early years provision. In 2016, the proportion of children who made a good level of development was below the national average. In collaboration with the local authority, the school subsequently identified specific issues and redesigned the provision. Changes to the leadership of early years, the curriculum and activities resulted in an above-average proportion of children who made a good level of development in 2017.
- Children in the early years are enthusiastic, highly motivated learners. Staff support the development of children's language skills well so that they can begin to read and write at an early stage. I observed a teacher skilfully extending children's understanding of synonyms such as 'meadow' and 'field'. The redesigned curriculum has made the progression of skills very clear.
- Children also develop an understanding of other cultures. For example, I observed children making a range of artefacts, such as lanterns, to celebrate the Chinese New

Year. The early years provision is highly inclusive. For example, children learn Makaton so that they can sign together.

- My final key line of enquiry focused on how well pupils are supported to keep themselves safe both within school and beyond. Pupils told me that they feel supported and well cared for. They understand the importance of online safety. They also know that they can turn to a member of staff if they have any issues and are confident that they will be supported. Pupils stated clearly that bullying is a rare occurrence and that staff resolve issues quickly.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils have opportunities to extend their skills, knowledge and understanding in every area of the curriculum so that more pupils make rapid progress and achieve the higher standards.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Aykin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During the course of this inspection I held meetings with you, senior and middle leaders and a group of five governors. I also met with your local authority school improvement partner.
- I spoke with pupils informally in classrooms and when walking around the school site. I also met with a group of 12 pupils.
- During two tours of the school with you, I visited each class and observed pupils at work.
- I undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work in their books and folders.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined along with the school's record of checks carried out on staff working at the school.
- A range of documents were analysed or discussed, including: the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans; documents relating to pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour information; minutes of governor meetings and curriculum plans.
- I considered the views of 51 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the views parents expressed via free text. I also considered

the views of 15 members of staff.