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26 February 2018

Mr Martin Smith
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Dear Mr Smith

Short inspection of Pixies Hill Primary 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 June 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection, despite much having changed in the last three years. There are a number of different staff members, and membership of the governing body has almost completely changed, including the chair of governors. Although the structure of the leadership team remains the same, you and your deputy headteacher are the only remaining members since 2014. You have recently appointed new leaders of English and special educational needs (SEN), along with the mathematics lead and pupil premium champion. It is to your credit that this team is already working very effectively to address the areas that you have identified in your school improvement plan.

For some time, you and your governors have been trying to raise the funds to extend the building. Frequently, there is little space for the very many activities that the school now entertains, including various music lessons, clubs, physical education (PE) activities and the breakfast club. The Friends of Pixies Hill raised a considerable sum of money towards enabling you to erect a separate building on site, which is very well used by both the school and the local community. After much consideration and in response to parental requests, you have set up your own breakfast club. After only a relatively short amount of time, it is now completely self-funding and extremely popular. Pupils begin their school day having had a healthy breakfast and spent time with their friends.

Pixies Hill is an inviting, vibrant school that pupils, parents and carers and staff clearly love. Pupils said that this is a 'fantastic, extraordinary school'. Pupils are

polite, courteous and well behaved and work well together. Pupils regularly hold doors open for their classmates or adults. What is more, when thanked, 'You're welcome', is a regular response. The values-based education that the school embraces is evident around the school. From the 'values tree' in the Reception classroom to the beautiful artwork in the corridors, the walls are adorned with displays about friendship, respect, cooperation and kindness.

It is no surprise, therefore, that pupils said that they are happy and safe and enjoy coming to school. They like that they are awarded for their good work, earning the 'star of the week' for such things as 'overcoming fears about swimming'. Showing one of the school's values is also rewarded twice a month with a 'values mug'. Pupils really like the many visits they make and the visitors who come to school to do, for example, pottery, or the Brazilian dance workshop. Parents overwhelmingly support the school. 'I firmly believe that this school is a fantastic place for my children to attend. They are extremely happy here and I couldn't be any happier with everything the school does.' The parent forum works well with you to improve and enhance the school. For example, it had considerable input into the revision of the school's behaviour and homework policies. Largely based around topic themes, the quality of the work that pupils bring in from home is high and is clearly a resounding success.

You and your governors know the school. As a result of careful analysis of pupil outcomes, you have identified the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Recently, you made the decision to introduce a new programme of phonics teaching. This is already paying dividends. Children in the current Reception class and Year 1 have undoubtedly benefited from the new programme. Many children and pupils in these year groups are achieving above their age-related expectations and are making rapid progress: something you were asked to improve at your previous inspection. They are using their phonic skills well to read with a considerable degree of accuracy and confidence, and make sensible guesses in their early writing. Progress can clearly be seen and evidences the capacity for improved outcomes at the end of key stage 1.

Another area that you were asked to improve during the June 2014 inspection was to ensure that all pupils were given work to stretch their learning further. Teachers regularly challenge pupils. Work is set which is matched to pupils' needs, often with additional challenges for when pupils have finished their work. In lessons, teachers and teaching assistants effectively guide and support pupils, often challenging them to think hard about what they are learning. As a result, you have increased the proportion of pupils achieving the higher standard at the end of key stage 2 and some in key stage 1. Although you have made inroads, you accept that there is still some way to go to ensuring that all pupils in key stage 1 achieve as well as they can.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that there is a safeguarding culture at Pixies Hill. Leaders and governors take their safeguarding role very seriously. You regularly evaluate the

effectiveness of the school's safeguarding and child-protection procedures with your chair of governors, highlighting any arising concerns.

You are tenacious in following up any concerns you have, liaising effectively with external agencies when necessary. As a result, pupils and families receive good support from both the school and appropriate external services. However, despite your best efforts, persistent absence of some pupils is still too high. You and your governors are committed to ensuring that this is reduced as soon as possible.

Pupils said that they feel safe, know who to go to if they have a concern and how to keep themselves safe when using the computer. That is because they are taught how to do so and teachers regularly plan work to reinforce this important area of the curriculum. Different displays round the school show pupils' work to highlight, for example, that bullying is unacceptable. 'We are all the same, but different – bulldoze bullies!' is just one example.

Parents are hugely supportive of the school and said that their children are not only safe, but very well cared for. They appreciate the extra support that you give them and their families. 'Pixies is a warm, safe environment with committed teachers who care about getting the best out of the children. They leave the school as confident, rounded individuals ready to move on to the next challenge.'

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I considered several key lines of enquiry to ascertain whether the school remains good. These were discussed at our first meeting. You and your team also asked for a further line of enquiry that you wanted me to take into consideration.
- My first line of enquiry related to the quality of teaching and learning in key stage 1. This is because the proportion of pupils that achieved greater depth in reading was below the national average in 2016, particularly for some girls and disadvantaged pupils. Results in 2017 showed that the proportions of pupils that achieved the expected standard and those who achieved greater depth in mathematics were below the national average.
- You have high expectations of teachers and have ensured that they are held accountable for the results of the pupils in their classes. At regular pupil progress meetings, you and your staff discuss the barriers that are preventing pupils from making the progress they can. Swift support is put in place and reviewed regularly to ensure that pupils make rapid progress. As a result, the school's own assessment information, including evidence in pupils' books, shows that the picture for the end of Year 2 in 2018 should be more positive than in 2017.
- At the latest pupil progress meetings, you highlighted that 21% of pupils are on track to exceed expectations in reading, including at least two disadvantaged pupils. You are anticipating that 87% of pupils will achieve, and 25% will exceed, the expected level of achievement by the end of the academic year.
- Information I saw about achievement in mathematics is even more positive. Only two pupils are not on track to achieve expectations, and a possible 27% to

exceed expectations. Coupled with this group's 2017 phonics results, this cohort, that was at national average when it left the early years, will be above national average at the end of key stage 1. These pupils have, therefore, made good progress across key stage 1.

- My second key line of enquiry related to how well leaders use available assessment information to ensure that all groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, make rapid progress. This was because, in your previous inspection report, this area of the school's work was highlighted for improvement.
- You have done much to ensure that teachers take into account pupils' prior attainment information to plan appropriate work to match their needs. We looked at the school's own assessment information for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. The picture is a little more mixed than it is for pupils overall, where a large number of pupils across the school are making accelerated progress in reading, writing and mathematics. However, you have detailed case studies which show the reasons why some pupils have not achieved as well as they might, and indeed why some have made considerable progress from their starting points.
- You were disappointed with last year's progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, as it reflected the results of 2016. As a result of the work that you and the new SEN lead have put in place, the majority of current pupils are making at least expected progress. Although it is early days, the impact of this work can already be seen. It was evident in learning observations that we conducted together, that teaching assistants are well used. Consequently, pupils are able to access the work that teachers provide and take part fully in lessons.
- The most able pupils said that work is sometimes challenging. They like the emphasis that teachers now put on making them think hard about their learning. Teachers regularly plan opportunities for pupils to explore application of their basic mathematics skills in real-life problems. 'I like challenging problems. It makes me really use my brain,' said one pupil. However, some most-able pupils in key stage 1 are not yet achieving as well as they might in mathematics.
- My third line of enquiry related to how much opportunity teachers provide for pupils to practise their basic English and mathematics skills across the curriculum. This is because this was an area that the previous inspection report highlighted for improvement.
- In one class seen during the inspection, pupils were working out how they could incorporate a number of features onto 'an island' of a specific size. Calculating the perimeter and area of, for example, a forest, they had to plan and draw how the features would fit into the available space. There was a real buzz in the classroom as pupils grappled with the problem. One group decided that it was impossible to fit it all in. Using their combined thinking, they decided to put the lake in the middle of the forest, in the middle of the island. 'Problem solved,' as one pupil said.
- Evidence in pupils' topic books show that teachers think creatively about how they plan for mathematics in other areas of the curriculum. Pupils are, therefore,

given regular opportunities to use their mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding in, for example, science, history and geography. Pupils record information in a variety of ways including bar charts, graphs and pictograms. What is more, they are encouraged to interpret what they have recorded, with the teachers emphasising the accuracy with which they need to record the information.

- Evidence in pupils' writing books shows that there has been a concerted effort to ensure that pupils write at length, whether in English lessons or lessons in other areas of the curriculum. For example, in their topic work, pupils wrote a diary entry for the Pudding Lane baker as part of the Great Fire of London topic. Older pupils wrote detailed accounts about Daedalus, 'the greatest inventor', during their topic on myths and legends.
- It is clear that teachers ensure that pupils' writing in subjects like geography, history and science, is of the same high quality as it is in their English books. This is because you and your staff have made explicit the high expectations you have of handwriting and presentation.
- The fourth line of enquiry was one that you and your team requested I explore and related to how teachers help pupils improve their work. This is because you have spent some considerable time in the last year ensuring that pupils are supported in knowing the next steps in their learning.
- Evidence shows that pupils are given the time to respond to teachers' helpful comments in their books. For example, in one pupil's book, the teacher commented, 'For suspense in your writing, add adverbs,' which the pupil then did. Equally, in mathematics work, teachers add challenge. 'Try adding three more and see what difference it makes to your answers.'
- Pupils said that the constant reminders on word mats, working walls or displays, ensure that they have everything at their fingertips to help them to become successful writers. Teachers skilfully break up pupils' learning into bitesize chunks. They encourage pupils to comment on their classmates' work and help them improve it. Pupils' written work often demonstrates how this is helping them improve and how they are using their wide reading experience in their writing. For example, 'Daniel had often been told not to ramble in the wild. He was normally a fun, cheeky boy, but very slowly that changed!'
- The fifth line of enquiry related to how well governors hold leaders to account for the progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged. This is because the progress of these pupils for the last two years has fluctuated. Attendance for these groups has been less than for other pupils.
- Governors keep a close eye on the effectiveness with which additional funding for both groups of pupils is spent and the impact it is having on individual pupils. Governors attend pupil progress meetings along with your senior leaders and are 'attached' to specific year groups. Governors said that this helps them to see pupils' progress as they move up the school and the impact of the support that these individuals are given.
- Your pupil premium champion and leader of SEN present you and your governors with regular detailed reports on the barriers that prevent pupils from making

good progress. Case studies of individual pupils are very detailed. Evidence was seen during the inspection of timely support, specific interventions and impact of those initiatives.

- Pupils who have had access to the school's nurture club, social skills group, counsellor and expert external agencies have made good pastoral progress. In turn, this has had an impact on their academic progress. There is still some work to do to ensure that all disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities make as much progress as they can, particularly in key stage 1. Leaders are committed to continuing to address this important area of their work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities in key stage 1 make as much progress as they are able in writing and mathematics
- the proportion of pupils attaining greater depth in key stage 1 in mathematics continues to increase
- persistent absence is reduced to be more in line with the national average.

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

Yours sincerely

Ruth Brock
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with you, your senior leaders and three governors, including the chair and vice chair of the governing body. I also met with a representative from the local authority. You, your deputy headteacher and I jointly observed learning in six lessons across most year groups. During this time, I spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at the work in their books. Together with your leaders of English and mathematics, we looked at pupils' work in their writing, mathematics and topic books. I took into consideration the views of 57 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, which included some texts. I also considered the survey responses of 79 pupils and 16 staff. I viewed a range of school documentation, including information relating to safeguarding, attendance, pupils' progress, the curriculum, school improvement plans and the school's self-evaluation.