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Mr James Adkins
Headteacher
Derwent Lower School
Hitchin Road
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Dear Mr Adkins

Short inspection of Derwent Lower School

Following my visit to the school on 6 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 January 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Derwent Lower has maintained the positive focus identified at the last inspection, with pupils developing both academically and socially. Parents and carers are supportive of the quality of education provided by staff. Parents commented in Ofsted's online questionnaire, *Parent View*, on the 'amazing' school staff and the 'excited and engaged children'.

Committed leadership, including that of governors, has ensured that the school's drive for improvement has continued unabated. You provide a clear vision for the future success of the school. You have worked hard to address the areas for improvement noted at the previous inspection and continue to ensure that pupils receive a good education.

Governance at Derwent Lower is strong. The governing body is led well and provides both challenge and support where appropriate. Governors are highly ambitious for the success of the school. They bring a breadth of expertise to the school, which strengthens the focus on e-safety, safeguarding, science provision and financial oversight. Governors are regular visitors to the school. The information they collate is used effectively to inform the ways in which they question you and your leadership team.

Pupils behave very well, both in the classroom and around the school. This helps to create a harmonious learning atmosphere. Pupils are enthusiastic learners and respond very well to teachers' high expectations. You have ensured that pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum. Pupils have opportunities to learn about different cultures and faiths through topics such as Canada and Judaism. Pupils also have specialist French and music

lessons, enabling them to extend their skills, knowledge and understanding. You ensure that pupils develop critical citizenship skills through fundraising for those who are less fortunate. Pupils develop their understanding of democracy, tolerance and free speech through voting for their fundraising charity and for the school council. As a consequence, pupils are developing into reflective, kind and caring citizens.

You correctly judge early years to be a strength of the school. Strong leadership in early years has ensured that children are well prepared for the demands of the key stage 1 curriculum. Both the pre-school and Reception classes are well organised and offer exciting activities for children. Staff have high expectations and ensure that children develop the skills, knowledge and understanding critical to success in later years. As a consequence, the proportion of children making a good level of development has increased markedly and is above the national average.

You and your leaders address areas where you consider improvements are required. For example, as a result of a range of strategies, such as attendance rewards and enhanced monitoring and tracking of pupils, you and your leadership team have succeeded in reducing the school's absence rate. Attendance was below the national average in 2016, and in 2017 it was firmly above the national average. You and your leadership team have worked hard to embed the link between success at school and school attendance with parents, carers and pupils. You recognise that you need to continue working with parents and carers to ensure that all pupils attend school regularly. You recognise that the improvements to pupils' outcomes in mathematics, reading and writing at the end of key stage 1 need to be sustained. You know that the guidance pupils receive to improve their writing in other curriculum areas is not as precise as it is in English. You also accept that reading for pleasure is not given as high a priority as other areas of the English curriculum.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils are very appreciative of the work of leaders and staff in ensuring that they are well cared for. Pupils understand the importance of keeping safe when online. You have ensured that e-safety has a high profile and pupils know what to do to protect themselves.

Pupils can define bullying. They explained that bullying was an extremely rare occurrence. They also insisted that any bullying incident would be dealt with quickly and appropriately by a member of staff. Leaders, including governors, ensure that safeguarding arrangements are strong. Records, including the checks made on adults who work at the school, are securely maintained. Safeguarding leads are tenacious in ensuring that vulnerable pupils receive swift and timely support. Adults are well trained and aware of their safeguarding responsibilities.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain that the school remained good, one of my key lines of enquiry was about the progress of pupils in developing their phonics skills at key stage 1. Since 2015, the proportion of pupils who achieve well in the phonics screening check has risen

markedly. You explained that you had improved the teaching of phonics in Year 1 through the systematic sharing of resources and consistent training. Pupils now achieve above the national average.

- You have also improved the teaching and learning of phonics in Reception and in the newly established pre-school. As a consequence, children develop phonics skills rapidly in Reception in preparation for the Year 1 phonics curriculum. I observed children in Reception using their phonics skills to write complex words such as 'lunchbox'. Many children in Reception make swift progress and are able to read well. Similarly, in the pre-school, children develop early recognition of the link between sounds and letters on a page.
- My second line of enquiry was about how leaders are sustaining pupil progress in mathematics, reading and writing in key stage 1. This was because results in 2017 at key stage 1 were particularly strong. However, in 2016, pupils achieved below the national average in mathematics, reading and writing. The previous inspection report noted the importance of improving the quality of guidance given to pupils. You and your leadership team have improved the quality of guidance in pupils' work in mathematics, reading and writing. Pupils regularly receive additional challenges in mathematics, helping to extend their skills and understanding. Pupils can select their own mathematics challenge and staff monitor this closely to ensure that they extend their understanding. As a consequence, the proportion of pupils who achieved greater depth in mathematics at the end of key stage 1 was above the national average in 2017.
- Pupils learn grammatical concepts such as adverbs and adjectives to improve their writing in English. Pupils regularly reflect and edit their writing, ensuring that their writing is both technically accurate and effective. I observed pupils in Year 2 enthusiastically selecting words and sentences to convey their experiences of visiting Whipsnade Zoo. However, teachers do not provide the same level of precise guidance for pupils' writing in areas of the curriculum other than English. As a result, pupils do not apply the same level of precision to their writing in other curriculum areas such as history, science and religious studies.
- Pupils develop the skills of reading well in many areas of the curriculum. Through the study of characters in texts and the function of purpose, audience and text type, pupils develop strong understanding of the meaning conveyed in texts. As a consequence, the proportion of pupils who achieved above greater depth in reading at the end of key stage 1 was above the national average in 2017. However, the importance of regular reading for pleasure does not have as high a profile in English as the development of other skills.
- I also sought to establish whether children in the early years provision make sustained progress. The proportion of children making a good level of development has increased sharply and is above the national average. To support children to make accelerated progress, you have recently introduced a pre-school provision. Having appointed a fully qualified teacher you have raised the academic profile of pre-school provision. I observed children enthusiastically learning about the alphabet through song. I also observed the ways in which staff supported children in developing an understanding of classroom routines.
- Children in Reception are eager to learn. I observed many children forming letters and words with care and precision. As a consequence, many children in Reception are

making rapid progress in their reading skills.

- My final key line of enquiry was about how well pupils are taught to keep themselves safe, both within school and in the world beyond. Pupils develop critical understanding of the importance of e-safety. Pupils told me that these lessons help them to keep safe when they are on the computer at home. Conduct in class and around the school is exemplary. Pupils are empathetic, friendly and welcoming to each other and adults. The curriculum helps pupils to keep safe in the world beyond school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to communicate clearly the link between attendance and achievement in school to pupils, parents and carers
- pupils make sustained and rapid progress in all areas of the curriculum by:
 - ensuring that pupils receive the same high-quality guidance to improve their writing in other curriculum areas as they do in English
 - ensuring that pupils read for pleasure more frequently.

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, other senior and middle leaders and a group of five governors. I also met with your 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; minutes of governor meetings; and curriculum plans.

- I considered the views of 61 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 20 members of staff.