

26 February 2018

Mrs Sharon Swinson
Headteacher
The Lea Primary School and Nursery
Moorland Road
Harpenden
Hertfordshire
AL5 4LE

Dear Mrs Swinson

Short inspection of The Lea Primary School and Nursery

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 December 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

The Lea Primary School and Nursery is a fully inclusive school that promotes the ethos of 'every child matters'. At the heart of your work sits the school's vision, 'learn, enjoy, achieve', and this permeates the work of leaders, staff and governors. Consequently, children and pupils are very positive about all their learning experiences.

Children and pupils are respectful to one another and all adults; they care about their friends and look after each other. This was characterised in the Nursery class, when a child working with play dough noticed there was no more play dough left for others to work with and, without prompting, said, 'If someone comes, I will give them some of my play dough.'

Pupils behave well, both in and out of the classroom, show courtesy and respect and try hard in their work. Pupils are given responsibilities in school and take pride when carrying them out. For example, pupils thrive on supporting younger children when they are 'Reception buddies'. They also talked excitedly about their whole-school roles as 'eco warriors' and 'digital leaders'.

Pupils are listened to and contribute well to school improvement. Pupils said that they feel their views are important and 'count for a lot'. For example, pupils spoke positively about the change in the way homework is set. They believed this has

come about because of discussions they have had. Pupils now think the way homework has changed has also contributed towards them being able to learn better. Pupils told me they now 'make choices' about their learning.

Leaders have continued the momentum of improvement over time. You systematically identify aspects of the school's work that can be fine-tuned and improved, then implement appropriate plans of action, carefully checking that the work achieves the required results. Consequently, this has ensured that the quality of teaching throughout the school remains good, and pupils continue to receive a good standard of education, no matter what their ability or need.

Governors have a well-developed knowledge and understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They provide measured and purposeful direction for the school's further development. They visit the school regularly and have established themselves as an integral part of the school community. Records of their work show that they successfully hold leaders to account for pupils' achievement.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly effusive about the school and the education, care and additional experiences it offers their children. One parent summarised what many say, writing: 'The Lea is a truly wonderful place, where all staff value, nurture and celebrate the talents and interests of all its pupils. It has a wonderful feeling of community and togetherness. It's all the little things they do so well that make it such a fantastic school and why children enjoy learning so much.'

You have moved forward the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. You have continued to train teachers effectively, including support for newer teachers and those that are new to the profession. The quality of pupils' presentation in their books is well developed. There is also evidence of increasingly better progress in mathematics. However, you have identified that the application of basic skills needs further development in the wider curriculum, most notably the opportunities to write in subjects other than English.

Safeguarding is effective.

The Lea Primary School and Nursery always puts the children's and pupils' needs and welfare first. Leaders, including governors, ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that staff training is fully up to date. All staff know the important role they have in keeping children safe. Records of any incidents are detailed and there is a clear chronology of actions taken. Referrals to outside agencies are made in a timely manner, to ensure that pupils and families get the support they need when they need it.

Attendance is monitored carefully to ensure that all pupils attend well. Where there has been persistent absence, you are very astute at identifying factors that affect this and swiftly follow these up so families are supported. As a result, the school community has a positive attitude towards its children attending school regularly.

Pupils said that they feel safe in school and know that any adult will listen to them

and take their worries seriously. They told me that bullying and poor behaviour 'doesn't happen much'. They expressed great confidence that if it did, an adult 'would definitely' deal with it promptly.

Parents wholeheartedly believe that when they leave their children in your care, they will be looked after as if they were your own. Parents commonly share the view that 'Lea is a school where all the children feel safe, ensuring they can develop a love of learning while enjoying their childhood.'

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was to check how you and your leaders are securing better outcomes in writing. This was because in 2017, in both key stage 1 and key stage 2, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard was below the national average and key stage 2 pupils made progress that was below the national average.
- You have acted quickly to secure a better understanding about the national expectations for writing and to improve the accuracy of your assessments. In particular, you listened to pupils' views about writing and increased opportunities for them to write creatively. Pupils are now more enthusiastic about writing and are becoming more effective writers. While this is improving pupils' achievement in writing, you have identified that pupils still need more chances to apply their writing skills to other curriculum areas.
- The school's assessment information shows that, across the school, pupils' achievement in writing is quickly improving. Current progress information indicates that a higher proportion of pupils are likely to attain age-related expectations or above at the end of key stage 2. This represents consistently good progress for pupils from their various starting points.
- Another line of enquiry was linked to how leaders are improving pupils' achievement in mathematics by the time they leave Year 6. This came about because, in 2017, the proportion of pupils achieving both the expected and the higher standard in mathematics in national tests was below the national average. Furthermore, mathematics was an area to improve from the previous inspection.
- You have improved the quality of the teaching of mathematics, which is now encouraging pupils to explain their methods and reasoning so they demonstrate that they fully understand mathematical concepts. For example, in Year 3, pupils could articulate their reasoning clearly and apply their mathematical knowledge and understanding precisely. Evidence indicates that, over time, pupils' achievement is better. In each year group, the proportion of pupils on course to attain age-related expectations has improved.
- The next aspect I explored was looking at how teachers ensure that they extend and challenge most-able pupils so that a higher proportion of them achieve the higher standards that they should. In both 2016 and 2017, in writing and mathematics, the proportions of pupils achieving the higher standards were below the national averages.
- The most able pupils are benefiting from the work that you have undertaken

more generally in writing and mathematics. Additionally, your chosen 'three challenge' approach is encouraging pupils to take more risks in their work and achieve higher standards. Pupils that I spoke to told me that they were always challenged and 'are not set a limit because we go as high as we possibly can reach and further!'

- The final line of enquiry was focused on how well disadvantaged pupils achieve so they are well prepared for the next stages in their education. This is because there are small numbers of disadvantaged pupils in each year group and published information does not give a clear picture of strong outcomes for this group.
- Though small in number, disadvantaged pupils are well supported, including through the additional funding that the school receives. Leaders, including governors, check that what they are doing makes a meaningful difference. For example, they check that the deployment of staff is being used to maximum effect. Leaders are now much more precise about any barriers that pupils may have to learning and intervene appropriately. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils are now making stronger progress from their starting points.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to increase pupils' opportunities to apply basic skills, most notably in writing, across subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics, so that they make better progress in the wider curriculum subjects.

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

Tracy Fielding
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held meetings with you, your deputy headteacher, the leader for special educational needs and some governors, including the chair. I also met with a representative from the local authority.

I visited all classes with you and during this time I spoke informally to some pupils and looked through a wide range of pupils' exercise books. I also met with a group of pupils to talk to them about safety, behaviour and how they felt about their school experiences.

We scrutinised documents related to the effectiveness of safeguarding, the capacity of leadership and management, and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. I also looked at a sample of pupils' current work, including that of disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils.

The views of 78 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account, as well as the 71 responses parents made using the free-text service. I also considered the letters from parents that I received during the inspection and the school's most recent parent survey. In addition, I looked at the 20 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey and the 63 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.