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Mr Steve Varnam
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Dear Mr Varnam

Short inspection of Halfway Nursery Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 9 March 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Through your strong leadership, the school has continued to improve since the last inspection, with the previous areas for improvement being addressed quickly and successfully. You are ably supported by a deputy headteacher who is equally passionate about ensuring that all pupils achieve well and make the very best progress possible. Work is very challenging, with effective support used to ensure that all pupils make good progress, with progress at times being exceptional.

Teaching over time in all classes is at least good, with much being outstanding. The class teachers know their children very well and ensure that the work set is matched to the pupils' learning needs and interests. As a result, pupils are highly motivated and want to learn. They remain engaged in their learning for long periods of time and show resilience and determination to succeed.

Since the previous inspection, you have worked hard to increase the challenge for all

pupils. The majority of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, make strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, many pupils achieve standards above those expected for their age. The proportion of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, achieving a high standard at the end of key stage 1 in 2017 was above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics.

Children in the early years make a very strong start to school. They achieve well from their starting points through carefully planned learning activities that inspire and motivate them to learn. The early years is a vibrant and purposeful area that promotes children's love of learning. Very strong adult questioning develops children's thinking and maximises their progress. The inspirational outdoor learning environment is used very effectively to promote independent learning as the children are able to access resources independently and initiate their own activities. Through high-quality adult interactions, children are encouraged to talk about their exciting learning.

Governors are very knowledgeable about the school and are keen to continually improve their effectiveness. They know the strengths of the school and show an unrelenting desire to continue to improve. They are clear about what the school does well and what remains to be done to bring about further improvement. Governors effectively hold leaders to account and carry out monitoring that allows them to accurately assess the impact of school improvement priorities.

The curriculum is designed to motivate pupils. Dinosaurs and space were just two of the themes that engaged all pupils in their learning. When talking about their learning, the pupils spoke with enthusiasm about the size of a dinosaur's teeth and the differences between Jupiter, Mars and Earth. The pupils want to come to school. During a recent snow day, a parent reported that their child said, 'I am sad the school is shut. Could I go to Mr Varnam's house instead?'

The classroom learning environments are inspirational and used well to promote pupils' curiosity. However, at times, a very small number of pupils in key stage 1 were not fully engaged in the continuous-provision areas. This is something that you are aware of and are in the process of developing.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school has a strong safeguarding culture. Staff and other adults in school receive regular safeguarding training. All records are up to date and stored securely. The management of the single central record is thorough, with a variety of checks made to enable the school to keep aware of any changes. The inclusion leader has a clear overview of the families who need early support and works very effectively to build strong relationships with them. Attendance is improving and the number of persistent absentees is declining rapidly.

Pupils behave exceptionally well. Behaviour in the classrooms is very strong as pupils

want to learn. During playtimes, pupils' behaviour is excellent. The imaginative equipment used to inspire pupils' play means that behavioural incidents during playtimes are rare. Pupils love playing with barrels, tools and bubbles. Adults interact with pupils to ensure that they have fun and exciting playtimes, for example playing football, singing rhymes and blowing bubbles.

Pupils understand British values. They know the school rules and can discuss them with confidence. Pupils feel safe and say that they can talk to any adult if they are worried. One child said, 'The teachers protect you in the school; they're like the rule of law – that's one of our British values.' The pupils can talk confidently about how to keep safe online and know about different types of bullying, although they said that they do not have bullying at their school.

Inspection findings

- At the start of my visit, we agreed a number of key lines of enquiry for the inspection. First, I looked at rates of progress across the school and how the curriculum supports challenge. Pupils are very well challenged at the school. Effective systems are in place to measure progress of individuals and groups of pupils and, as a result, pupils are effectively monitored. This has ensured that the vast majority of pupils are making strong progress. Disadvantaged pupils are well supported in this school. They receive high-quality teaching which engages them through a very motivating curriculum. When pupils need additional support, additional funding is used well to support the pupils through pastoral and academic interventions.
- The parents and carers of children of all abilities are incredibly enthusiastic about the levels of challenge their children receive. They said the school pushes their children, while ensuring that the children have fun and want to come to school. One parent said: 'My child is always challenged, but in a way that is fun and exciting, so they don't feel any pressure. They just want to come to school.'
- I also wanted to review the quality of middle leaders and how they support senior leaders to drive improvement. Middle leaders are a real strength of the school. They are very astute and have a secure understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in their subjects. They are passionate about their own subjects but have a vision about how their subject fits in with whole-school improvement. They can confidently discuss the assessment systems for their subject and know, for example, the percentage of pupils at age-related expectations in their subjects. Their action plans are sharp and well planned. Middle leaders use monitoring and evaluation very effectively to improve the quality of teaching. Governors are also involved in the monitoring of the impact of the middle leaders' work through regular school visits and governors' meetings. Staff morale throughout the school is high. They feel well supported and are proud to work at this school.
- You have worked very hard to improve the teaching of reading across the school. A consistent approach to the teaching of phonics has been developed. Staff subject knowledge and confidence in delivering phonics have supported improved outcomes. All adults are well trained and have a sound understanding of how children acquire new phonics learning. This is applied effectively in pupils' books

and learning. The pupils enjoy their phonics sessions, with one child saying, 'I love this.' Pupils want to learn how to read and want to use letters to communicate in writing. This was clear through the high level of resilience and motivation seen in all lessons. Adults ensure that all pupils receive additional provision when needed to either support or challenge. Although there was a dip in the phonics scores in 2017, the pupils who did not achieve the standard are catching up with their peers quickly, through targeted support and high-quality phonics teaching. Pupils in the early years develop their skills of reading through high-quality phonics teaching and are well prepared for Year 1.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- develop the use of the continuous-provision areas in key stage 1 to ensure that they are used in the most effective way to enhance learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Eve Morris
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the inclusion manager and a range of middle leaders. I also met with three members of the governing body and spoke with a representative from the local authority. I evaluated documentation including the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan, information about pupils' progress, minutes of governing body meetings, behaviour and attendance records and information about safeguarding. I spoke with several parents and considered the 59 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I spoke with pupils from a range of year groups and I listened to some pupils read. You, your deputy headteacher and I visited every classroom together to observe teaching and learning and scrutinise pupils' work in their books.