

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Ms Leigh Humphries  
The Leys Primary and Nursery School  
Ripon Road  
Stevenage  
Hertfordshire  
SG1 4QZ

Dear Ms Humphries

### **Short inspection of The Leys Primary and Nursery School**

Following my visit to the school on 15 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 February 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

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

The Leys is a school where the pupils enjoy their learning and achieve well. Lessons are purposeful, with pupils benefiting from effective teaching in a friendly and supportive atmosphere. Parents and carers are positive about the quality of education that the school provides. Parents commented in Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, on a 'fantastic school' where 'the teachers are amazing, very helpful and hard-working'.

You have built a cohesive team, with you and your senior leaders having the confidence and support of the staff. Consequently, the vast majority of staff who responded to the online survey agreed that the school is effectively led and that they enjoy working at the school.

You and your team have worked hard to address all the issues from the previous inspection report so that pupils continue to receive a good quality of education. For example, you have ensured appropriate levels of challenge in lessons for the most able pupils. This is evident in the high number of pupils exceeding the expected standard in both key stage 1 and key stage 2 in 2017.

Governance is a strength of the school. Governors work hard and have high ambitions for the school. They undertake regular monitoring activities, as well as evaluating a range of other evidence, including internal and external reports, in order to accurately assess the strengths and weaknesses of the school. As a result,

they are clear about achievements to date and the areas that require further development. They are supportive and challenging in equal measure.

You address areas where improvements are needed. For example, in 2016, there was a dip in reading and the proportion of pupils reaching expected national standards was low at the end of key stage 2. As a result of a range of strategies implemented by you and your leadership team, the proportion of pupils who achieved expected standards in reading rose and was above the national average in 2017. These strategies included the introduction of an online reading programme to test and improve pupils' comprehension and range of vocabulary. You recognise that this improvement in outcomes for reading at the end of key stage 2 needs to be sustained. You also know that while attendance is improving overall and for most groups, persistent absence is still above the national average for pupils who are disadvantaged, and needs to be reduced. You accept that while key staff have a detailed knowledge of what is being done to improve the attendance of individual pupils, systems for tracking attendance at the school need to be enhanced. This is because your systems do not help leaders and governors to rigorously evaluate persistent absence rates to spot trends and take further action to improve attendance of all groups of pupils.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding takes a high priority across the school. Policies and procedures are up to date and are reviewed regularly. Safer recruitment procedures are rigorously followed, and all pre-employment checks are in place with records meticulously maintained. Staff receive appropriate training and are knowledgeable about what to do if they have a concern. Governors fulfil their safeguarding duties effectively and regularly check that school procedures are fit for purpose.

The school takes its duty of care very seriously and records of safeguarding incidents are detailed. Leaders with specific responsibility for child protection are clear about how and when to refer cases to outside agencies, such as the local authority and the police, in order to keep pupils safe.

All of the pupils I spoke with told me they feel safe and well cared for at school. They are able to clearly articulate how the school helps them to keep safe in and out of school including how to stay safe online. Almost all parents who completed Parent View agree that their children feel safe and are well looked after in school.

### **Inspection findings**

- To confirm that the school remains good, my first line of enquiry focused on pupils' achievement in mathematics, reading and writing at the end of key stage 2. This was because, in 2017, attainment was strong in all three areas at the end of Year 6.
- During the inspection I undertook joint observations across key stage 2. In these classes, teachers make effective use of their subject knowledge to plan appropriately demanding activities for pupils. For example, pupils spoke

enthusiastically about the range of activities in guided reading sessions and how they were helping them to improve their reading. Equally, work in both mathematics and English showed pupils making good progress, with teachers' feedback helping pupils to understand what they need to do to improve. Leaders of mathematics, reading and writing have clear plans to improve these areas further. Their monitoring has identified inconsistencies in the use of guided reading books across the school, with work not always being marked in line with the school's marking policy.

- Pupils' achievement at key stage 1 formed my second key line of enquiry. This was because, in 2017, the number of pupils exceeding expected standards in mathematics, reading and writing at the school was higher than the national average.
- Work in books shows that a large number of pupils are being appropriately challenged to exceed expected standards. For example, Year 1 pupils are being expected to write increasingly complex sentences independently. Equally, they are being challenged to use punctuation, capital letters and finger spacings with greater accuracy in their work. Work in the books in Year 2 show that your staff are extending pupils in mathematics. For example, the most able are being expected to understand and apply their knowledge of the four times table to solve problems.
- My next line of enquiry concerned pupils' attendance, which was lower than that of other pupils nationally in 2017. Similarly, persistent absence, where a pupil has missed 10% or more of their schooling, was much higher at the school than at other schools nationally.
- The school's overall attendance figure and the attendance of most groups of pupils have improved markedly since September 2017. You work effectively with pupils, their families and other agencies to improve attendance. Pupils are positive about the school and value the rewards offered for good attendance. Governors identify attendance as a priority and have a clear overview of the procedures being used to encourage improvement. Even so, you acknowledge that more can still be done to increase attendance and reduce persistent absence, including improving your current tracking systems.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning formed my final line of enquiry. This was because the number of fixed-term exclusions at the school, including repeat exclusions, was above the national average in 2015, 2016 and 2017. Many of these exclusions are linked to the primary support base. This provision is part of the school and offers places for pupils who have been excluded, or are at risk of exclusion, from other schools in Stevenage. You and your governors are aware of the impact of this provision on your exclusion figures. However, the effective support your school is providing to these vulnerable pupils was clear in my learning walks around school.
- The behaviour of pupils around the school and in lessons is calm and purposeful. This is because there are clear expectations about how pupils should behave and clear systems for managing behaviour. One pupil described how 'if you do something bad, you get a red or yellow card'. Consequently, almost all parents who completed Parent View agree that the school makes sure that its

pupils are well behaved.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvements that have been made in reading are embedded
- absence and persistent absence are reduced by:
  - the school working even more effectively with families so that the attendance for groups of pupils improves and is at least in line with national expectations
  - enhancing tracking systems so that leaders and governors are able to spot persistent absence rates by group quickly and take effective action based on clear evidence.

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

James Adkins  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

- During the inspection, I met with you, your leadership team, three middle leaders and your family support worker. I also met with the chair of the governing body and another governor as well as a representative of the local authority.
- Policies and procedures for safeguarding the pupils were examined along with the school's record of checks carried out on staff working at the school.
- During two tours of the school, I visited classes in both key stage 1 and key stage 2. I spoke with pupils during their lessons and around the school. I formally met with a group of eight pupils.
- I reviewed the standard of pupils' work both in lessons and from a sample of books.
- During the visit, I considered the school's information about attendance and persistent absenteeism. I also scrutinised a wide range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans.
  
- I also considered 77 responses from parents to Parent View together with their responses on the free-text service, 184 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire and 62 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.