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Mrs Maxine Stafford
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Dear Mrs Stafford

Short inspection of Abbey Lane Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 March 2018 with Joan Hewitt HMI, 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 July 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since then, you have continued to develop the skills of the leadership team and there is a real sense of togetherness and ambition among your leaders. You, along with other leaders and governors, have an accurate understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas that need further attention. As a result, outcomes for pupils have improved. Pupils are eager to learn and they show very good attitudes to their learning in class; they stick at the tasks they are learning, support each other well and show high levels of independence. Parents and carers said that their children enjoy school and the range of activities you provide. They are confident that their children are safe in school because you and the staff care for them well.

Leaders have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and what they need to do to improve aspects of the school. There is a supportive culture that reaches across the school, and staff know that they can turn to each other for advice and for further professional development. They appreciate the training opportunities they receive and feel that these really help them to improve as professionals. High numbers of pupils reach a good level of development by the time they leave the early years, and these successes continue into Year 1 when the proportion of pupils achieving the Year 1 phonics check is well above the national average. By the time pupils reach the end of Year 6, outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics are well above the national average. Leaders have accurately identified that there is still work to be done in ensuring that more pupils reach the higher standards at the end of key stage 1.

The governing body is extremely supportive of the school and knows what leaders need to do to continue to improve the provision for pupils. Governors are confident that leaders' actions are helping the school to move forward and are keen to see an acceleration of this progress. School improvement planning sometimes lacks precision, however, which makes it difficult for leaders and governors to evaluate actions in a sharp and timely way. Governors receive detailed information about pupils' achievements in English and mathematics, from senior and subject leaders and from school-to-school reviews. The information they receive about other subjects is not as comprehensive, and so leaders and governors are less confident about how well pupils are doing in these subjects.

The school has a good partnership with the local authority and with other local schools. A recent school-to-school review has helped leaders to reflect on the success of their actions and what needs to be done next. Staff value the opportunities they have to look at practice in other schools and compare the work of pupils. You provide high-quality support for your new teachers and, as a result, induction into the profession is effective.

During the last inspection, the need to provide more challenge for pupils in key stage 1 was identified to ensure that more pupils reached higher standards in writing. Leaders responded by ensuring a more consistent approach to the teaching of writing, and their work has been effective. Recent assessment information confirms that the proportion of pupils reaching these higher standards in writing has risen to be in line with the national average. Teachers use engaging tasks across the curriculum to provide many opportunities for pupils to write about different subjects. Pupils enjoy writing and benefit from some effective support from the teaching assistants in the classroom.

The last inspection also highlighted a need for all teachers to improve the quality of feedback about pupils' written work. Leaders have tackled this thoughtfully and considerately to develop an agreed approach. Teachers and other adults now provide pupils with constructive guidance, in line with the school policy, that helps them to improve their work. The responses that pupils make show that the new approach is having a strong impact on learning. Throughout this period of development, leaders have maintained expectations about high standards. They have focused strongly on the presentation of work and the quality of pupils' handwriting. This emphasis has led to significant improvements. However, some variation in pupils' written presentation remains. Some work is beautifully presented, which confirms that high expectations are possible. However, in a few cases, adults do not sufficiently challenge pupils when presentation is inconsistent. Consequently, this slows down progress for these pupils.

Improving the way that leaders and governors work with parents to listen to their concerns was recognised as an area for improvement during the last inspection. Parents are very positive about the experiences their children enjoy and feel that they are well cared for. Parents recognise the sense of teamwork among teachers and the efforts that they make to ensure that the pupils enjoy exciting activities.

While the majority of comments about leaders were positive, a significant proportion of parents who responded still feel that communication with senior leaders needs to improve and that their concerns are not always considered carefully.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are effective. Appropriate training takes place for all staff and governors so that everyone knows what to do should they have a concern about a child who may be at risk. Leaders provide frequent updates for staff to cover different aspects of safeguarding.

The designated leaders for safeguarding work together to ensure that all staff who are new to the school receive relevant safeguarding training as soon as they begin. There is good pastoral support for the pupils, and the Positive Play area provides a space for pupils to receive pastoral support should they need it. Pupils' attendance is consistently above the national average.

Pupils are taught how to stay safe in a range of situations through assemblies and through classroom activities. Pupils have a clear understanding of how to stay safe online and can talk about the potential dangers of using the internet. Pupils have a real confidence in staff to address any issues they may have; they show an awareness of different forms of bullying and said that instances of name-calling are infrequent. Pupils said that they feel safe and enjoy coming to school.

Inspection findings

- I wanted to find out whether teachers provide enough challenge for pupils to reach the higher standards in key stage 1. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standards is now above the national average, and the proportion of pupils reaching the higher standards has improved since the last inspection, although this dipped slightly in 2017. We saw consistently strong teaching through Reception and key stage 1, supported by excellent relationships between adults and pupils. As a result, pupils work diligently and stick at their tasks even when they are not being supported by an adult. Teaching assistants guided and supported pupils effectively, and the questions they asked prompted pupils to think and to develop independence in their learning. You explained that you had put in place measures to ensure that all pupils receive the correct amount of challenge in lessons by making it clear what each group of pupils should be learning. The teaching we saw during the inspection showed that teachers are taking this into account and are planning activities that meet the needs of different abilities. We found that, while challenges for the most able pupils are provided, sometimes these are not challenging enough. Sometimes pupils do not get on to the more stretching activities quickly enough. In other instances, the level of challenge meets the needs of all pupils and really pushes them to think deeply.
- In recent years, there has been a gap between the attainment of boys and girls in reading, writing and mathematics in the early years and in key stage 1. More

girls than boys have been reaching the expected levels. Leaders have recognised this and have put in place steps to ensure that this difference begins to diminish. Leaders have identified all boys not currently meeting the expected standards and have put in place individual plans to meet their needs. This has ensured that these pupils remain a focus for teachers and other adults and that they are tracked more thoroughly each half term when assessment information is collected. Teachers have begun to consider the themes they use for learning and to make these more exciting. For example, in the early years, teachers have extended the focus on butterflies to a study of mini beasts. They have introduced exciting first-hand learning experiences, such as visits to the National Space Centre or through the creation of mummies as part of a study about Ancient Egypt. As a result, we saw pupils enjoying their learning and engrossed in the tasks that were presented. It is too early for this to have narrowed the gaps between girls' and boys' performance, but the evidence in books now shows little difference between the work of boys and girls overall.

- Since the last inspection, there have been significant improvements in the outcomes for pupils in key stage 2, particularly in reading and mathematics. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher standards in reading and mathematics is well above the national average. Progress in writing has not been quite as strong, so I wanted to find out why this was the case. You have rightly identified this as a priority for the school and have put steps in place address this. We could clearly see in lessons and in books that teachers give pupils clear guidance about what to do to improve their writing. Challenges are available to extend pupils' learning but, again, these are not always reached quickly enough or do not sufficiently challenge the most able pupils. Your new system to check how well pupils are progressing has enabled you to identify with more confidence what needs to be done. This is reinforced by your comprehensive system of allowing teachers to check each other's work to see whether the judgements they are making are accurate. As a result, your assessment information, backed by the evidence in books, shows that the proportion of pupils reaching the higher standards in writing is beginning to increase.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standards at the end of key stage 2 last year was in line with the national average for other pupils. This was not the case in the early years or in key stage 1; not enough pupils reached standards of which they are capable. You have a clear plan in place that identifies the barriers to learning that these pupils face. These plans are adjusted throughout the year to ensure that the needs of these pupils are met and, as a result, attainment for these pupils is higher this year in key stage 1. You have accurately identified mathematics as an area to focus on with your pupil premium funding. You have also ensured that plans make provision for the most able disadvantaged pupils. Your efforts to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils have been successful, and attendance has risen sharply to be closer to the national average.
- As we visited classrooms and looked at books, we noticed that the quality of learning in some subjects did not mirror the standards you expect in English and mathematics. While pupils receive a broad curriculum, they do not develop a sufficient depth of understanding in some other subjects. The quality of

presentation is not of the same standard as in English and mathematics, and there is less attention paid to stretching the most able pupils. Similarly, the leadership of these subjects is less well developed than that of English and mathematics. This means that there is less certainty about how well pupils are achieving in these subjects. It also contributes to uncertainty for leaders about what decisions they need to take to improve the wider curriculum. You have started to address this, and there are some plans in place from subject leaders, but this work is currently underdeveloped.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching provides consistently high challenge for all pupils in lessons so that outcomes improve further
- leaders and teachers track the progress of boys carefully throughout the school and continue to develop strategies to ensure that boys' outcomes are closer to those of the girls in key stage 1
- leaders provide effective guidance and support to subject leaders so that the quality of work across a range of subjects reaches the same standards of English and mathematics and so that leaders have a clearer overview of standards
- actions to strengthen relationships with parents help parents and carers feel that their concerns are listened to, respected and addressed thoroughly.

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

Jaimie Holbrook
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I looked at specific aspects of the school's work, including leadership, the quality of teaching and learning, the progress that different groups of pupils make and safeguarding arrangements.

You and I worked closely together throughout the inspection. We observed teaching and learning and discussed the ways in which you use the pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils. Along with the deputy headteacher, we discussed the school's strengths and areas for improvement.

I studied a range of school documentation, including the school's self-evaluation

document, development plans, the pupil premium plan, school assessment information and safeguarding information. I met with senior and middle leaders, representatives of the governing body, a local authority representative, staff and pupils. I noted the 89 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. In addition, I took into account the 26 responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire.