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Mrs Bernadette Holmes
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Holmes

Short inspection of Strathmore Infant and Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 January 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You are a highly respected, dedicated and knowledgeable leader. Your able deputy headteacher and senior leadership team provide strong support. Together you have built a skilled and committed team of staff who strive for the best possible outcomes for the pupils in your care. All 25 staff who responded to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire agreed that the school is led and managed well. Staff enjoy working at the school and feel well supported because there are systems in place for sharing ideas and planning together.

Children in the early years make good progress because of the stimulating learning environment and well-chosen activities that help them to quickly develop their skills, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. As they move through the infant school, pupils continue to achieve well. This is because the learning experiences their teachers plan for them are relevant and engaging. Overall outcomes at the end of key stage 1 are positive, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. For example, in 2017, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics was above the national average. By the end of Year 2 at Strathmore Infant and Nursery School, most pupils are very well positioned to move successfully on to junior school.

Relationships between staff and pupils are a strength of the school. Adults provide effective role models for pupils, and teach them to be polite and considerate of others. Pupils were observed happily taking turns, sharing equipment and helping each other. Pupils say they love coming to school. They told me they enjoy their

lessons because they learn in a fun way and they learn lots of new things. Pupils also told me, 'Our teachers explain things really well.'

You, your leaders and governors clearly value your partnership with parents. Consequently, you work hard to engage with parents in a variety of ways to develop positive home/school links. For example, on the day of the inspection, parents came into school and worked with their children in a successful indoor and outdoor mathematics workshop. Parents commented on how useful it was to see how their children learn. They also stated and that the workshop gave them many ideas for supporting their children's learning at home.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and all those who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school to others. Parents appreciate the dedication, warmth and approachability of staff. Parents also believe that their children are happy and taught well. One parent spoke for many by saying: 'The school provides a happy, safe and nurturing environment and encourages the children to learn and achieve whilst still allowing them to be themselves.'

Overall, you and your governors have maintained the strengths identified in the previous inspection, and have addressed the areas for improvement. For example, effective steps have been taken to strengthen the teaching of phonics across the school. The phonics lessons we observed together were interactive and fun, so pupils were interested and enjoying their learning. When I heard a group of pupils read, they demonstrated a good level of phonics knowledge. As a result of the actions taken by you and your leaders, pupils' attainment in phonics has improved and for the past two years has been broadly in line with the national average.

Governors speak with pride about the school, and share your enthusiasm and desire to improve it further. They know the school well through frequent visits and discussions with pupils, parents and staff. You and your governors recognise the importance of evaluating the school's strengths and weaknesses and planning for future improvement. However, you acknowledge that these processes are not yet fully developed. The school's self-evaluation document is overly descriptive and not sufficiently analytical. This means that it is not fully effective in ensuring that plans focus well on the most important areas for improvement. The school development plan is not sufficiently sharply focused to ensure continued improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors place great importance on all aspects of safeguarding and this is ensuring that arrangements are fit for purpose. Thorough checks are made to ensure that all staff and volunteers are suitable to work with children. These are routinely monitored by governors to confirm adherence to school policy and statutory guidance.

You and your deputy headteacher, as the designated safeguarding leads, promote a strong culture of vigilance. Staff and governors are fully trained and know how to support pupils if they need help. Staff and governors are also clear that

safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

You and your deputy headteacher have established strong relationships with a range of professionals and external agencies. However, you are not afraid to provide challenge if the service provided falls short of your expectation that pupils should receive the best care.

Pupils told me that they feel safe and are well looked after in school. They say that there is no bullying and that they can talk to any adult if they have any concerns. All parents who responded to Parent View agreed that their children are happy and safe in school.

Inspection findings

- I identified specific lines of enquiry to check that the school remains good. We agreed these at the beginning of the inspection and you told me that none of them were a surprise. One area I explored was how leaders are ensuring that pupils achieve well in mathematics across the school. This was an area for improvement in the previous inspection report. Assessment information published in 2016 and 2017 shows that pupils' outcomes were positive at the end of key stage 1. However, when these results were compared with national results for those years, pupils did not achieve as well in mathematics as they did in reading and writing.
- Your deputy headteacher, who is also the mathematics leader, is confident and passionate about the teaching and learning in this subject. She has led training for the teaching team to make sure that high-quality mathematics lessons are taught consistently throughout the school. The school's chosen focus on providing creative and practical learning opportunities, both indoors and outside, has been successful. During the inspection, I observed the effective teaching of core mathematical skills. Work in pupils' books demonstrates that they are provided with regular opportunities to use their mathematical knowledge to think deeply and solve problems through a range of interesting and enjoyable activities.
- As a result of these focused actions, work in pupils' books, displays around the school and the school's current assessment information demonstrate that pupils, including the most able pupils, are now making better progress in mathematics throughout the school.
- Another area I considered was whether the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is being spent effectively in order that this group of pupils make good progress across subjects. You and your leaders recognise that, in 2016 and 2017, disadvantaged pupils did not achieve as well as they should in reading, writing and mathematics.
- You, your leaders and governors ensure that pupil premium funding is used effectively to support disadvantaged pupils. Any barriers to learning are swiftly identified for those disadvantaged pupils who are underachieving, including those who also have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Appropriate interventions and support are put in place to address their learning and well-

being needs. The disadvantaged pupils I spoke to during the inspection were confident, happy and fully engaged in their lessons.

- Work in pupils' books shows clear progress and the additional support that has been devised for disadvantaged pupils is having a positive impact. The school's current assessment information demonstrates that disadvantaged pupils are now making better progress across the school. However, you have rightly identified that a greater number of the most able disadvantaged pupils need to reach greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1.
- Finally, I explored how well pupils are supported and encouraged to attend school. This line of enquiry arose from historical information showing that not all pupils attended school as often as they should. Attendance figures improved in 2017 and I was interested to see the actions you and your leaders have taken to raise pupils' attendance.
- You and your leaders are aware of the need to improve attendance. Rigorous procedures are in place to establish the reasons for any pupil's absence. This includes working closely with the local authority attendance improvement officer to monitor the attendance of pupils closely. You and your leaders are quick to address attendance issues; for example, staff phone parents at the start of the day when pupils do not turn up for school. Pupils' good attendance is also celebrated through class and individual rewards, which are popular.
- Your focused actions continue to have a positive impact. The school's current information shows that pupils now benefit from more regular attendance. No pupils are disadvantaged by low attendance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school's self-evaluation is appropriately self-critical and school improvement planning focuses sharply on the most important areas, to ensure continued improvement
- a greater proportion of the most able disadvantaged pupils attain greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics at end of Year 2.

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

Fiona Webb
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- You, your deputy headteacher and I discussed the lines of enquiry for this inspection, the school's internal evaluation of its performance, plans for future improvement and information about current pupils' progress and attainment.
- Meetings were held with you, your deputy headteacher and a group of your governors, including the chair of governors. I also spoke with the school's local authority improvement adviser on the telephone to discuss their work with the school.
- I gathered different types of evidence to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included joint observations with you and your deputy headteacher of teaching and learning in classes across the school.
- We looked at a sample of pupils' current work across all subjects, and across a wide range of abilities.
- I spoke informally to a number of pupils in classrooms about their learning, and met more formally with a group of pupils to talk about their school experience.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff and case studies about referrals made to external agencies. A discussion was held with you and your deputy headteacher, as the school's designated safeguarding leads.
- The views of 110 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account, as well as the 96 responses parents made using the free-text service.
- I also considered the 25 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey.