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Mrs Deborah Richards  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Richards

### **Short inspection of Cathcart Street Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 15 May 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 June 2014.

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

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

As the new headteacher, you have lifted the expectations of staff, parents and carers about what the school expects of pupils' behaviour, attendance and learning. Weak outcomes in 2016 for pupils in Years 2 and 6 in national assessments of their reading, writing and mathematics spurred leaders to swift action. With skill and determination, leaders have addressed weaknesses in staff's teaching and their assessments of pupils. Thanks to extensive training, intensive support and precise guidance to staff, the quality of teaching once again makes a positive difference to pupils' learning. Pupils' attainment rose strongly in national assessments in 2017. Pupils make good progress. School information demonstrates that their attainment continues to rise in reading, writing and mathematics throughout the school.

Staff, leaders and governors are determined to give pupils a broad range of experiences to enrich their understanding of the world. Staff plan the curriculum very carefully to strengthen pupils' first-hand experiences and their language. Pupils visit many special places, such as local museums, art galleries and places of worship. They speak with a wide range of visitors to the school and participate in numerous whole-school events and fundraising activities.

Leaders give close attention to improving all aspects of the school, for example the planned curriculum, extra-curricular clubs and the quality of staff's knowledge of different subjects. They set ambitious targets to improve the work of staff and

match these with frequent support. Staff are becoming more confident and creative in how they teach. For example, in Year 3, they taught pupils to measure volume by using jugs of coloured water. Pupils were full of enthusiasm and deeply engaged in their learning. In their books, pupils wrote keenly how they had solved the challenges set by the teacher.

Staff morale is high. They appreciate the way that you and other leaders challenge and support them in their work. You focus clearly on developing the well-being of teachers and teaching assistants. Leaders and governors make a determined and successful effort to manage staff workload.

Parents say that staff and leaders are frequently available to speak with them, for example in the playground at the start of the day. They say that leaders respond fully to any concerns they raise. Leaders and staff know the needs of individual pupils in detail. Parents are happy with the work of the school, particularly their children's progress in reading, writing and mathematics. They value the regular communication from leaders via social media, the school website and newsletters.

You have successfully addressed most of the areas highlighted for improvement at the previous inspection. In lessons, pupils are clear about what staff ask them to do. Staff give pupils sufficient time to complete activities. Senior and middle leaders develop precise, well-informed plans to improve the school. They and governors use these plans to review the pace and scale of improvement. Even so, leaders and staff have found it more difficult to ensure that the most able pupils attain at greater depth in their writing, reading and mathematics. Leaders and staff are not complacent. They are working to make sure that even more pupils achieve beyond expected standards.

Pupils' overall attainment and progress in writing are good. Staff and leaders are taking many steps to improve pupils' writing skills throughout the school. We agreed that you need to do even more to improve boys' writing in key stage 2. This is because, in some classes, the attainment of boys lags behind that of girls.

Since the previous inspection, the school has developed a successful new class for two-year-olds. For example, in this class, children enjoy a wide range of fiction and non-fiction books presented attractively in a cosy reading area. Staff give much attention to helping two-year-olds develop their language and social skills. However, some leaders do not have a detailed understanding of the learning and care needs of this specific age group of children. Across the early years at the school, children aged two, three and four learn to become confident mathematicians and skilled writers. Even so, some staff help children too much in activities. This holds them back from developing their confidence and thinking as much as they could.

Cathcart is a calm school set in modern premises with a professional, yet child-focused feel. Leaders and staff pay great attention to making sure that classrooms and study areas are welcoming, well resourced and supportive of pupils' learning. Staff have displayed pupils' beautiful three-dimensional models throughout the school to celebrate their splendid recent work in art lessons.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders and governors make certain that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. They use their detailed understanding of the main local risks to the protection and welfare of pupils to train staff and develop support for pupils and their families. Governors double-check that staff understand their responsibilities and how to act in response to any concerns. Leaders and staff develop pupils' self-belief and their ability to be resilient when tasks or circumstances are challenging. Pupils learn to stay safe near water, which is a local issue in the parks, docklands and riverside in Birkenhead. Staff teach pupils from Nursery to Year 6 how to avoid the pressure to join gangs outside school. Staff help pupils and parents to understand how to stay safe when using social media and the internet.

Leaders and staff pursue a comprehensive range of actions to improve pupils' attendance at school. This is helping to improve the attendance of many pupils, including those whose circumstances might make them vulnerable. Staff are vigilant. They know what might indicate that a pupil's care or protection is at risk. Leaders keep careful records of any concerns. They meet frequently and extensively with other agencies in support of pupils and their families. Where needed, leaders challenge other professionals about their response to child-protection issues. Governors have good access to training about safeguarding. They take their responsibilities very seriously and check the safeguarding work of the school in detail.

## **Inspection findings**

- A key focus for this inspection was to consider how successfully staff are supporting pupils in achieving at greater depth in their learning. Leaders and staff now debate more thoughtfully what teaching might deepen pupils' learning. Teachers are becoming more skilful, for example in how they use questions to aid, challenge or extend pupils' learning. Staff and leaders check the attainment and progress of pupils in detail. Subject leaders in mathematics and English consider how satisfactorily staff plan opportunities for pupils to learn in greater depth. They plan what further action is needed to support pupils, including the most able. Through training and team discussions, staff have raised their expectations of what pupils can and should achieve at Cathcart Street Primary School. I saw clear evidence that, in mathematics and English, staff give pupils the opportunity to explain verbally and in writing their understanding of concepts at greater depth. School information indicates that the proportion of current pupils attaining at greater depth in mathematics, writing and reading across the school is improving. However, you agreed that it is important to ensure that an even greater proportion of pupils attain well in reading, writing and mathematics this academic year and beyond.
- I wanted to find out how expertly staff are developing boys' writing. This is because, in Year 6 in 2017, boys' attainment was lower than that of girls, even though the overall picture of pupils' attainment and progress in writing was good. Leaders and staff have overhauled the provision of books for pupils to read, including online material. Staff deliberately use book titles considered appealing

to boys in reading and writing activities. They use poetry successfully to inspire boys to write. For example, in Year 5, the teacher challenged pupils to write about how the character felt in the poem 'The Highwayman'. Staff use many techniques to improve the writing of boys and girls. Their teaching focuses much more systematically and sharply on the language they intend pupils to learn and use in their writing. Staff now give pupils many more opportunities to write at length in history and geography. They plan a wide range of trips for pupils, as well as giving them the chance to speak with visitors and complete extra activities.

- Better teaching is helping to improve the content of pupils' writing. Boys' work, including in Year 6, demonstrates that they are making better use of rich, accurate language, grammar and punctuation. They take more care in the quality of presentation of their writing. They are writing more work at length and with better awareness of different audiences. The proportion of boys attaining at least the standard expected in their writing is rising quickly. However, school information demonstrates that, in key stage 2, boys' attainment in writing remains behind that of girls, particularly in Years 4 and 5. We agreed that leaders and staff need to make sure that they diminish this difference.
- Given that the proportion of children in the early years reaching a good level of development was below the national average in 2017, I wanted to understand how soundly you are improving provision in Nursery and Reception. You showed me information that children start at the school with skills and abilities below those found typically for three-year-olds. From these starting points, children make good progress. Staff have good access to training that helps to improve their work, for example in teaching mathematics and in helping children learn to write. Leaders use extra advice from the local authority and links with other schools to help staff to refine their work. In the early years classes at the school, children learn to be active, inquisitive learners. They benefit from many activities to develop their well-being, language, writing and mathematical skills. Nevertheless, we agreed that sometimes staff help children too much. This affects children's ability to act independently and to think for themselves.
- You have created a new class for two-year-olds to help give children a stronger start at school. While these youngest children are benefiting from their attendance, we agreed that leaders need to develop an even greater understanding of the unique needs of two-year-olds.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the proportion of pupils exceeding the standards expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics continues to rise this academic year and beyond
- current actions to improve teaching and learning diminish the difference between boys' and girls' writing in key stage 2

- leaders develop their understanding of the specific care and learning needs of two-year-olds at the school
- staff in the early years give children even more opportunities to act and think for themselves.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you and the deputy headteacher to consider your reviews of the school and your evidence of improvement. I considered information about the achievements of current pupils. I met with the leaders for English and mathematics and looked at examples of pupils' recent work. I spoke with staff and leaders about the early years. With senior leaders, I visited a sample of classrooms to observe activities and speak with pupils about their learning. I met with the chair of governors. I held a further meeting with two other governors. I spoke with a representative of the local authority by telephone. I also spoke by telephone to the school improvement associate. I reviewed a range of documents, including leaders' action plans and targets for teachers.

I spoke with some parents as they brought their children to school. I considered 11 responses from parents to Ofsted's online Parent View survey. I checked the information presented for parents on the school's website and social media feed. I reviewed responses from 92 pupils to an Ofsted survey. I took into account responses from 27 staff to an Ofsted questionnaire. I discussed safeguarding and pupils' attendance with governors and with senior leaders, including the family engagement lead. I asked some staff about safeguarding practice. With you and the business manager, I checked the school's single central record of checks on the suitability of staff, governors and volunteers to work with pupils. I also considered a sample of the school's safeguarding records.