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Mr Philip Horne  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Horne

### **Short inspection of Smithdown Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 1 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 March 2014.

#### **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 specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection.

Since the previous inspection, governors have made several important appointments to strengthen the leadership of the school further. You were appointed as headteacher in September 2015 and recognised the need to secure strong leadership across all areas of the school during the programme of expansion. You now have a range of leaders with specialisms and expertise in vital areas and the skills of the team have supported the growth of the school. You and your leaders have established an ambitious vision for the school, shared by staff and governors.

You have created a highly inclusive learning environment in which everyone is valued and diversity is celebrated. Your pupils, who between them speak 43 different languages in addition to English, feel warmly welcomed and secure in school. Pupils told me that in their school nobody is left out. Parents agree and typically comment that they are 'delighted with the friendly, supportive and safe environment' in school. In another example, parents note that 'staff know how to find a common language with different children'. The strong culture of high expectations and excellence in teaching and learning ensures that the individual

needs of pupils are well known and that they are supported effectively. As a result, most pupils do extremely well.

You and your leadership team have efficiently tackled the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. One of these was to ensure that pupils receive clear guidance on how to improve their work. You were also asked to make sure that pupils have enough time to practise their skills by completing work. Pupils' books show that they develop appropriate skills to edit and improve their work, which becomes more sophisticated as they move through school. Pupils pay careful attention to the feedback they receive from teachers and take pride in the presentation of their work across the curriculum.

A further area for improvement was to ensure that leaders regularly check the quality of teaching and the impact of this on pupils' learning and progress. Effective systems are in place to track the progress of individual and groups of pupils across the curriculum carefully. Regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning enable you to provide tailored training to meet the professional needs of individual staff. You motivate and guide your staff very well and, like you, they are ambitious for the pupils and the school.

Leaders keep all aspects of provision under review so that it continues to develop and improve. The rich curriculum is very well planned in almost all areas to provide interesting experiences for pupils. For example, pupils are involved in designing an edible garden and will use the plants grown for cooking. Pupils elected as science ambassadors have created science bags full of stimulating activities that others can use to extend their science learning at home. Where leaders have concentrated on improving the curriculum, pupils have made rapid progress. You have appropriate plans in place to develop all subject areas, including geography, which is less well developed.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are robust. The safety and well-being of pupils are integral to all aspects of the school's work. Pupils confirmed that they were happy and felt safe in school.

The highly skilled pastoral team swiftly identifies the support needed for pupils and their families who join school mid-way through the academic year. Frequently, the families have faced significant trauma and instability and pupils have experienced long periods without attending school. Well-designed support systems help pupils and families to assimilate quickly into life in the community and the school.

Staff are vigilant in their approach to safeguarding. Leaders ensure that staff are well trained and kept regularly informed so that the safety of pupils is always a priority. There are strong links with community groups and welfare agencies and appropriate referrals are made when needed.

Governors regularly check the effectiveness of the school's work to keep pupils safe.

Governors keep themselves informed with safeguarding training and successfully use their knowledge to ensure that the school's safeguarding procedures are compliant.

Staff, governors and pupils are rightly proud of achieving School of Sanctuary, an award that recognises the school's success in creating a safe environment for everyone.

## **Inspection findings**

- In this inspection, I focused my time on four different aspects of the school's work. I wanted to find out whether children in the early years make good progress. Children's attainment on entry to school is low and they often arrive with limited or no English. Highly effective support focuses on developing the language skills not only of the children but also of the parents, so that they in turn can help their child at home. Activities in Nursery and Reception are varied and exciting and the new outdoor area provides an inspiring environment which children explore with concentration and enthusiasm. Children were very keen to share the books which they had written and illustrated, telling the story of 'The Three Billy Goats Gruff'. They made competent use of their understanding of the sounds that letters make to read and write new, simple words. The proportion of children who reach a good level of development continues to rise and the children are very well prepared for Year 1.
- The second area I investigated was whether pupils continue to make strong progress in reading and mathematics. For the last three years, pupils in the school have made significantly better progress than all pupils nationally. From their different starting points, pupils at Smithdown Primary School continue to make strong and sustained progress in reading and mathematics. Inspection evidence confirms that the school's achievement information is accurate. There is little variation in the progress of different groups, including disadvantaged pupils. Each year, pupils' progress improves because of high-quality teaching. You explained the difficulties of comparing the attainment of pupils year on year because cohorts of pupils can change significantly, depending upon when pupils arrive in the country. However, for two out of the last three years, pupils have reached or exceeded the standards expected of them. An increasing proportion of pupils are reaching the ambitious targets set for them in mathematics and reading.
- Next, I considered why the progress pupils that make in writing lags behind that of reading and mathematics. Although rates of progress are similar to all schools nationally, pupils' attainment was lower in 2017. You have identified that for the significant number of pupils whose first language is not English, the complexities of writing provide a greater challenge than reading or mathematics. However, you are not complacent and have prioritised the improvement of writing across the school. A consistent approach to the teaching of writing, including spelling, grammar and punctuation, has brought about improvements. You have introduced strategies to support pupils to talk about and adapt stories to help create their own. Teachers model good writing through the high-quality texts they use and provide pupils with useful tools in the classroom. Pupils are

encouraged to write for a purpose and their work is celebrated in the vibrant displays around the school. This reinforces the high standards expected. These initiatives are having a positive impact but you recognise that this area of the school's work must remain a priority in order to bring progress in writing in line with that of reading and mathematics.

- Finally, I wanted to check whether the attendance of pupils whose first language is not English is as good as that of all pupils, because data published about the school suggests that it is not. However, this data is misleading because 92% of your pupils speak English as an additional language. Attendance across the school is better than at all schools nationally and persistent absence is lower. You and your staff work very hard with community and faith leaders to ensure that cultural and religious differences are understood. You celebrate various religious festivals with equal enthusiasm and involve the whole family in these events. This has helped reduce absence during periods of religious observance. Pupils appreciate the rewards to promote good attendance and a significant proportion achieve 100% attendance throughout the year. The family support mentor works closely with individual families to help address problems that may prevent parents bringing their child to school.
- Governors are well informed and have an excellent overview of the school's effectiveness. They explained that they are better informed about the school's progress because you are open and honest about what is working and what needs to improve. You provide them with accessible information about the progress that pupils make. They confirm this information through their regular visits to school. In addition, they talk to pupils regularly through the representative groups that have been established, including the school council. Consequently, governors are able to fully hold you and other leaders to account for your work.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to improve pupils' writing skills to enable them to achieve as well in writing as they do in reading and mathematics
- the clear ambition for pupils' excellent learning is fulfilled equally in all areas of the curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Catherine Parkinson  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher and some of your subject leaders. I met with the school's family support mentor and attendance officer. I spoke with the local authority school improvement partner. I met with members of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair. I visited several classes and you observed teaching and learning with me. Together with some of your teachers, I looked at pupils' work and listened to pupils read. I met with a group of pupils from the school council. I spoke to a group of parents on the school premises, I took account of the 10 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and evaluated the free-text responses. I considered the 31 responses from staff to the Ofsted online questionnaire and the 64 responses to the pupils' questionnaire. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and the school development plan. I viewed a range of information about pupils' attainment and progress. I scrutinised the safeguarding document and I undertook a review of the school's website.