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Mr Nicholas Snape
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Dear Mr Snape

Short inspection of Pilsley Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 4 July 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 last inspection. You have led the school by example, ensuring that at the heart of the school's work for continuous improvement is the school's motto, 'inspire, respect and achieve'. With high expectations and aspirations for the pupils in your care, you and the staff have created an inclusive, mutually supportive environment, where all are welcome. Almost without exception, pupils enjoy coming to school because they feel like they 'belong' there. They delight in each other's successes and know they are listened to because their opinions are valued. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the work of the school. In the words of one parent, 'It is clear to see that the teachers are working continuously to create a safe, happy, welcoming and educational environment for our children.'

You have realistically and accurately identified the school's strengths. However, you and the staff are not complacent and are always looking for ways to make the school even better. For instance, you acknowledge that pupils do not achieve well enough in the Year 1 phonics screening check. Your current priorities are detailed and strike a considered balance between aiming to secure improvements in pupils' outcomes, while also focusing on enhancing pupils' well-being. All staff who responded to the Ofsted survey said the school is well led and managed. Those teachers who lead specific areas of the curriculum receive close support and they are confident in their roles. Staff feel respected and motivated and, like the pupils, they are genuinely proud to be associated with the school.

Pupils attend well and have positive attitudes to learning. As a result, their good behaviour is a strength. Both in the classroom and out on the playground, I observed positive relationships between pupils of all ages. While, occasionally, there are still some instances of poor behaviour, one pupil told me confidently that 'teachers are very good at dealing with it'. Pupils enjoy taking on positions of responsibility. For example, behaviour on the playground has improved since members of the school council introduced the 'Pilsley code'. Meanwhile, 'play buddies' successfully organise games for other pupils during lunchtimes. Parents who responded to the Ofsted survey all agreed that pupils behave well and are allowed to flourish.

Staff at the school have created a bright and vibrant learning environment. Pupils' work is celebrated on every wall and displays are used to support pupils' learning. Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, focus on doing well. An overwhelming majority of pupils say that teachers help them to do their best. Leaders, including in the early years, have worked hard to engage parents more frequently in their children's learning. Many parents who I spoke with said they appreciate being able to talk with their children's teachers. They praised the regular communication they have with teachers about their children's progress, as well as the many opportunities their children have to take part in extra-curricular activities.

You work closely with the governors to provide them with comprehensive information about the performance of all areas of the school. They are dedicated individuals who are supportive of the improvement plans. They trust your judgement in evaluating the progress leaders are making towards achieving the priorities identified. However, a number of governors are relatively new to the role and are not able to hold you robustly to account, for example with regard to the progress pupils are making. Established support from the local authority has helped you to review aspects of the school's work, including with governors, to bring about positive changes.

At the last inspection, inspectors asked leaders to improve boys' communication and language skills early in their school experience. The school's information shows that boys are well below the national averages for communication and language when they enter the school. However, current boys, particularly in the early years, are making rapid progress in these areas of learning; indeed, the longer they are in school, the stronger their progress becomes. The leader of the early years successfully designs activities that explicitly focus on boys' learning, promoting their language and their conversation skills. Boys are increasingly confident talkers and teachers track their progress closely, to ensure that they fill any gaps. Due to this stronger foundation, boys currently in Years 1 and 2 are making better progress in their reading and writing than girls.

Another recommendation from the previous inspection was to improve the level of challenge provided for all pupils, including the most able. In 2017, almost no pupils in key stage 1 achieved greater depth in reading, writing or mathematics, including almost none of the most able pupils. Leaders have focused specifically on strategies

to develop pupils' higher-order thinking skills. For example, in classes we visited jointly, we observed teachers using skilful questioning to deepen pupils' understanding of a text. Pupils who I spoke with said that they feel challenged in lessons, but they know what they need to do to make faster progress. They eagerly take the opportunity to work independently on homework tasks and develop their skills further. The school's information indicates that an increased proportion of the most able pupils in Years 2, 3 and 4 are achieving at the higher standard, compared with the progress that the same pupils made last year. Nonetheless, there is still work to be done to ensure that an increased proportion of pupils achieve at the highest standards in reading.

You ensure that teachers have ready access to appropriate and timely information about each individual pupil's progress. You meet with each teacher to review the progress of pupils in their classes, ensuring that teachers' assessments of pupils' work are accurate. In both classes we observed and books we reviewed, there were clear examples of teachers skilfully using the information to plan pupils' learning, in order to meet their needs precisely, including in the early years. When pupils are falling behind, teachers use additional adults effectively to support pupils, so that they can catch up. Current pupils' information indicates that pupils in Year 6 have maintained the good progress, while pupils in Year 2 are making stronger progress, compared with pupils in 2017.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. A strong culture of safeguarding pervades every aspect of school life. From the security of the school site, to the training staff receive, right through to the records of pupils referred to external agencies for additional support, you adopt an uncompromising approach to your responsibilities as the leader of safeguarding. You ensure that all the necessary checks are carried out before an adult starts working or volunteering at the school. Staff and governors are acutely aware of their safeguarding duties. They receive training and frequent updates, including with regard to the risks to pupils from radicalisation and extremism. They understand the need to communicate any concerns about pupils promptly, so that leaders can make a timely response to keep the pupil safe.

Staff and parents are certain that pupils are safe in school. Pupils say they feel safe and they have someone to talk to if they have any concerns they want to share. Pupils are positive that teachers resolve swiftly the occasional bullying that takes place; parents agree. Pupils have benefited from the visits of staff from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, who teach pupils for example that 'Privates are Private' as part of their 'Let's talk PANTS' campaign for parents and children. Similar visits by other organisations help to educate pupils about the risks posed, for example by drugs, as well as fire and road safety. Pupils are confident they know how to stay safe online. As one parent explained, in this school, pupils are, 'exceptionally well cared for'.

Inspection findings

- In 2017, pupils' progress in key stage 2 mathematics increased, having already been significantly above the national averages for the previous two years. Disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities made stronger progress than other pupils. In addition, the progress and attainment of both boys and girls improved.
- Current pupils in Year 6, including groups of pupils, continue to make good progress in mathematics. This success is due to the strong emphasis placed on securing pupils' basic number skills, before extending their learning and understanding. We saw evidence of teachers clarifying pupils' misconceptions both in books we reviewed and in learning we observed. Teachers provide pupils with ample opportunities to practise their problem-solving and reasoning skills, as well as revisiting prior learning to reinforce a concept, for example when learning about different types of angles.
- The proportion of pupils in Year 1 who achieved the expected standard in the phonics screening check has declined over the last three years. Recent changes to the way teachers deliver phonics has led to better outcomes for current pupils, compared with 2017. When we observed pupils' learning in phonics, pupils used well-established routines to practise identifying and blending sounds, while adults provided effective support to those pupils who were struggling. From their different starting points, pupils' needs were being met. However, pupils' outcomes in phonics are still below the 2017 national average. Pupils' books show that they do not use their phonics skills consistently to support improvements in their spellings.
- In 2017, the proportions of pupils who attained the higher standards in reading at key stage 1 and key stage 2 were below national averages. Leaders have introduced new strategies to enhance pupils' abilities to interpret text and they have instilled a 'joy of reading' into many pupils. Teachers provide pupils with more opportunities to build up their stamina by reading longer texts. Pupils we observed reading about Nelson Mandela used their skills to interpret the text confidently and expressed their opinion on the issues it raised. In all year groups, current pupils are attaining more highly and achieving stronger progress in reading. However, you recognise that there is more work to do to ensure that the new strategies have a sustained impact on pupils' reading outcomes.
- Leaders provide pupils with a rich curriculum diet, for example through extracurricular sports and musical events, including playing with the Hallé orchestra. Pupils understand the importance of British values and how concepts such as individual liberty relate to them. Diversity and difference are encouraged and pupils readily treat everyone equally. This is of particular relevance for those pupils who attend the enhanced resource provision for autism in school. Leaders successfully integrate pupils in the provision into many activities with other pupils, enhancing the experiences of all involved.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- an increased proportion of pupils achieve the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check and all pupils use their phonic skills consistently to improve the accuracy of their spellings in written work
- they continue successful strategies to improve pupils' reading, so an increased proportion of pupils progress to the highest standards by the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2
- governors' skills for their analysis of the school's assessment information are further developed, so they can hold leaders to account more thoroughly, through the school's improvement plan.

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

Yours sincerely

Rachel Tordoff

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and I held meetings with leaders responsible for literacy, numeracy and the early years. I also met with the coordinator for the provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. I met with two members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. I also spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone.

I visited five classes, jointly with you, to observe pupils' learning. I also visited an assembly. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school and during lessons. I spoke with a group of pupils in Years 5 and 6, as well as speaking with other pupils informally. I scrutinised a selection of pupils' workbooks with you. I met some parents informally at the beginning of the school day. I took into account the 40 responses to Ofsted's online survey Parent View including the 24 free-text comments. I also considered the 27 responses to the pupil survey and the 14 responses to the staff survey.

I evaluated a range of information, including the school's self-evaluation, the school's improvement plan, documents relating to safeguarding, minutes of meetings of the governing body, reports of visits carried out by the local authority, information relating to pupils' attainment, progress, attendance and behaviour, the school's use of additional government funding and a selection of school policies.