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Mr Roger Rathbone
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Rathbone

Short inspection of Stechford Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 17 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 December 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and the leadership team have high expectations of pupils and staff. A strong team ethic exists across the school and staff are proud to work at Stechford. They are committed to providing the best education they can for pupils.

You know the school well, including its many strengths and few weaknesses. For example, you know that mathematics teaching is a strength of the school, but you recognise that pupils' explanations of their thinking is an area to improve. Similarly, although your actions to improve writing this year have been successful, inspection evidence shows that pupils' independent and/or creative writing still has some weaknesses.

You address areas for improvement thoughtfully with carefully constructed and effective strategies. For example, your response to a dip in some pupils' attendance in 2017 involved deploying a family support worker to help parents. Consequently, attendance has returned to its previous high level this year.

Similarly, you have addressed the areas for improvement in the school's previous inspection report effectively. Leaders now make regular checks on pupils' progress. All pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able, make good progress because of consistently effective teaching.

Your school's care for all pupils, especially those who are vulnerable in some way, is of a high quality. For example, pupils who join the school speaking little English receive effective support. Pupils enjoy school and have excellent attitudes to learning. Many told me of how they like and trust their teachers. They said they appreciate the many opportunities that the school provides for them, including clubs, activities and off-site visits, in this country and abroad.

I spoke with many parents at the start of the inspection. They were unanimous in their praise for the school. They told me how friendly and approachable staff are, and also about how well pupils behave in school.

Safeguarding is effective.

All pupils who spoke to me during the inspection said that they feel safe in school. All parents with whom I spoke agreed, as did all members of staff who completed their inspection questionnaire. Pupils told me that bullying is very rare indeed and they have great confidence in teachers and other adults in school to deal with any bullying, or other problems, which might occur. They understand how to keep themselves safe. Several pupils enthusiastically told me how they have been taught to stay safe when using the internet.

The leadership of safeguarding is meticulous. The systems are clear and well understood by staff. Records relating to child protection are detailed, well organised and stored securely. You have trained staff well, so they are alert to the signs that pupils might need some extra help. They pass on to leaders any concerns they have about pupils, and leaders respond speedily, seeking external support when appropriate. You challenge outside agencies when you are unhappy with their response to your referrals.

Your staff go 'above and beyond' to check that pupils are safe. For example, they regularly visit pupils at home if they fail to attend school without adequate explanation.

Inspection findings

- The first area that I considered during the inspection was the progress that pupils make in school, especially in light of a dip in some key stage 2 outcomes in 2017. Prior to 2017, outcomes at the end of Year 6 had been very strong in all subjects. You were disappointed with results in 2017, especially in writing. You identified some weaknesses in how writing had been taught, especially in light of the greater demands made by changes to the curriculum and national testing. Consequently, leaders revised the school's approach to teaching writing, with teachers now regularly demonstrating effective writing to pupils and providing more support for pupils to plan written pieces of work. This approach has proved successful. Pupils now write with greater confidence and enthusiasm. Unvalidated results for 2018 indicate that writing outcomes have improved considerably. However, pupils' writing remains weaker when they are expected to write without a pre-planned structure, for example when writing creatively.

- Unvalidated key stage 2 test results for 2018 indicate that reading outcomes, which had dipped a little in 2017, have recovered to their previous standard. Outcomes in mathematics have remained strong throughout and continue to do so in 2018. Pupils now make good progress in all years and in all subjects. Outcomes at the end of key stage 1 are consistently at or above national figures in reading and mathematics. They are strong at the expected level in writing, but a little below the national figure at greater depth.
- The inspection's second focus area was the provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language. Most pupils in the school speak English as an additional language. All but a few speak English fluently and read confidently. However, because English is not their first language, or the language spoken at home, their range of vocabulary, background knowledge and therefore comprehension is often weaker than it might outwardly appear. Your approach to meeting these pupils' needs is effective. Teachers teach with precision. They consistently model correct speech. They have high expectations of pupils' speech, spelling, grammar and use of punctuation. The school's work schemes in several subjects, including topic work, are explicit in developing pupils' knowledge and broadening their vocabulary. As a result, these pupils make strong progress.
- A small number of pupils who speak very little English join the school each year. They are very well supported. On entry, your staff assess their spoken English and then provide high-quality, well-planned, and individualised support. Staff carefully monitor their progress in speaking English, as well as their progress in other subjects. They spend most of their time in their class, doing work that is appropriate to their ability. These pupils make strong progress in acquiring English and also more generally.
- My final focus area was the degree of challenge provided for the most able pupils in school. Teachers have high expectations of all pupils, including the most able. They routinely plan work that makes them think hard. For example, I saw recent work in the books of pupils in Year 3, where they had produced high-quality scripts for a play. Similarly, I observed pupils in Year 4 tackling difficult mathematical problems with confidence. The most able pupils generally make good progress in all years, although their progress remains weaker in writing than in reading or mathematics.
- The teaching of mathematics is strong across the school for all pupils, including the most able. Pupils of all abilities have good number skills. They use their arithmetic skills well to solve the problems that teachers routinely expect them to attempt. Pupils, especially the most able, use reasoning well and are able to explain their thinking. They generally do this well verbally, but their ability to explain their thinking in writing is weaker.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that pupils, including the most able:

- become more proficient writers when expected to do so independently and/or creatively
- are better able to explain, in writing, their reasoning when solving mathematical problems.

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

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, members of the senior leadership team and other staff. I visited several classes with senior leaders, during which we observed teaching and learning and spoke with pupils about their work. Alongside a senior leader, I scrutinised a selection of pupils' books. I talked with many pupils in lessons and at breaktime. I met with the chair of the governing body. I scrutinised several documents including your self-evaluation, your school development plan, and safeguarding and child protection records. I talked with several parents as they dropped their children off at the start of the school day. There were insufficient responses to Parent View for me to view them, but I did consider the six free-text comments. I reviewed the 18 responses from members of staff and the 10 responses from pupils to the respective Ofsted online questionnaires.