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Mrs Jo Cooling
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Cooling

Short inspection of Mill Lodge Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 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 May 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment in September 2014, you and your leadership team have created a calm and purposeful learning environment for pupils and staff. Pupils are happy and achieve well across the school.

The pupils I spoke with were positive about the school. They have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities, because leaders promote these effectively. Pupils talk confidently about how the school's agreed 'rights' help to resolve arguments and, as one pupil explained, 'make us feel accepted'. As a result, pupils are respectful of different faiths and cultures and demonstrate caring attitudes towards others.

Staff teach pupils about British values, such as democracy, well. When standing for election to the school council, pupils prepare speeches to persuade their classmates to vote for them. Once elected, pupils on the school council play a proactive role in school improvement. For example, they have recently organised a highly successful 'hopes and dreams' week for pupils to learn about a range of professions and consider what jobs they would like to do when they are adults.

You and your staff have made progress in addressing the areas for improvement from the last inspection. Staff have received training to develop their skills in meeting the needs of the most able pupils. As a result, the proportions of pupils achieving the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of

key stages 1 and 2 have increased over the past two years.

The subject leaders for English have introduced a new approach to the teaching of writing to provide more opportunities for pupils to write purposefully and at length. As a result, work in books shows that pupils in some classes have developed their skills in producing extended pieces of writing. Pupils' attainment in writing at the end of key stages 1 and 2 has been above national averages for the past two years. However, inconsistencies in the teaching and assessment of writing remain across classes, and there is still a gap between the attainment and progress of boys compared to girls. Furthermore, weaknesses in pupils' spelling and punctuation reduce the overall quality of their writing.

Governors are committed to, and supportive of, the school. They receive regular reports from the headteacher and, as a result, have a broad understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, many governors are new to their roles. Consequently, they have not yet developed the skills and depth of understanding to challenge leaders with sufficient rigour. They are over reliant on the headteacher's reports, and the information they receive does not focus enough on the impact of leaders' actions on improving pupils' progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff training is up to date and in line with statutory requirements. As a result, staff have a secure understanding of the signs that might indicate a child is at risk of harm. They are clear about the process to follow should they have any concerns about a child's safety or welfare. Leaders respond appropriately to concerns raised by staff and make timely referrals to external agencies, when necessary.

Leaders and staff know pupils and their families well. Consequently, they are alert to any changes in pupils' appearance or behaviour and communicate openly with parents and carers to build a picture of pupils' individual circumstances. However, leaders acknowledge that they need to strengthen record-keeping relating to pupils' welfare, particularly in relation to the outcomes of actions taken. The current approach means it is difficult for leaders to review the effectiveness of actions and to track patterns for individual pupils over time quickly and efficiently.

Pupils learn how to stay safe in different situations. They understand the risks associated with using the internet and know not to share their personal details and passwords online. Pupils say they feel safe in school. They know who to go to if they are worried or upset and trust that adults will help them. Pupils have a good understanding of bullying and talk confidently about the different forms this can take. They say that bullying is rare, and that, when it does happen, adults are good at resolving it. Almost all parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View agree that their children feel safe at school and that staff look after them well.

Inspection findings

- My first key line of enquiry was to explore how effectively leaders are using pupil premium funding to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 2. Published information shows that outcomes for these pupils have been below those for other pupils for the past two years.
- Leaders identify the barriers to learning faced by disadvantaged pupils, including poor language and communication skills. Staff tailor specific strategies to address these barriers. Leaders regularly check the progress of disadvantaged pupils and provide effective support if pupils need to catch up. As a result, work in pupils' books and the school's assessment information show that most disadvantaged pupils in key stage 2 are now making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- A small number of disadvantaged pupils have more complex needs. Leaders provide training for staff to equip them with the knowledge and skills to support pupils' social and emotional development effectively and to build positive relationships with vulnerable pupils. This boosts pupils' confidence and self-esteem and enables them to access learning more successfully.
- Over the past two years, standards in boys' reading and writing have not been as high as those of girls. My second key line of enquiry was to look at how well teachers meet the needs and interests of boys to ensure that they make strong progress and achieve well in reading and writing.
- Adults in the early years have taken effective action to improve boys' progress in these key areas of learning. They give careful thought to planning purposeful and engaging activities to develop children's reading and writing skills. For example, in free-choice activities, such as construction and the mud kitchen, adults encourage children to label models, record instructions and write recipes. These actions have been particularly effective in capturing boys' interests and ensuring that they write frequently. As a result, boys currently in Reception are making strong progress from their different starting points and the attainment gap between boys and girls is closing.
- Similarly, evidence collected during the inspection shows that boys' reading and writing in key stages 1 and 2 is improving. Leaders ensure that there is a balance of topics and texts that appeal to the interests of boys and girls. An online reading programme has increased pupils' motivation to read. 'Real' experiences, such as an alien crash landing on the school field, stimulate boys' imagination and result in some high-quality pieces of writing. All of the boys spoken to during the inspection were positive about reading.
- School assessment information shows that boys are now making similar progress to girls in reading in almost all classes. However, a gap in attainment remains. In writing, girls in key stage 2 continue to make stronger progress than boys.
- My third key line of enquiry was to investigate the impact of leaders' actions to improve pupils' attendance and behaviour, particularly that of boys and disadvantaged pupils.
- Pupils' rates of absence have steadily increased over the past three years. The

absence of boys and disadvantaged pupils has been above national averages for the past two years. There is now a stronger focus on attendance across the school and in communication with parents. As a result, pupils know that it is important to attend school every day.

- Leaders know families well and follow up promptly when pupils are absent. They work closely with external agencies to ensure that families get the support and guidance they need. Leaders' actions have been successful in improving the attendance of some pupils significantly, although there are still individuals with high absence rates because of specific needs. Staff know these pupils well. They provide effective support and review the impact of their actions regularly.
- Fixed-term exclusions rose steadily between 2014 and 2016 and were above national averages. Leaders have taken successful action to address this. Individual behaviour plans, nurture groups and work with parents support pupils to manage their feelings and behaviour increasingly effectively. Leaders only use exclusion as a last resort to send a clear message to pupils about unacceptable behaviour. As a result, there were no fixed-term exclusions in 2017 and the number of fixed-term exclusions has remained low this academic year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- boys' progress in reading and writing continues to improve, so that the difference in outcomes between boys and girls diminishes further
- all teachers have the knowledge and skills required to assess pupils' writing accurately, and leaders make regular checks to ensure that assessment information is reliable
- the accuracy of pupils' spelling and punctuation improves, and teachers consistently address errors so that pupils do not repeat mistakes
- leaders record in appropriate detail the actions taken in response to concerns about pupils' welfare and the outcomes of these actions
- governors receive training to strengthen their effectiveness in holding leaders to account for the impact of actions to improve pupils' outcomes, particularly pupils' progress from their different starting points.

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

Yours sincerely

Claire Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the two assistant headteachers and the early years leader. I met with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body and held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. I observed pupils' learning in parts of six lessons; in four this was done jointly with senior leaders. I also listened to a group of pupils read. I looked at a range of pupils' work in lessons and examined pupils' work in English books with senior leaders. I met with representatives from the school council and a group of Year 6 pupils. I also talked to pupils in lessons and took into account the 36 responses to Ofsted's online pupil questionnaire. I examined a range of documentation, including information relating to current pupils' attainment and progress. I also scrutinised a range of safeguarding documents and information about pupils' attendance and behaviour. I considered the 20 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire. I spoke to parents at the start of the school day and took into account the 55 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View.