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Mrs Sally Reay
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Reay

Short inspection of Clipstone Brook Lower School

Following my visit to the school on 16 October 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 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Since the previous inspection, there have been several staffing changes, including the school's leadership team. You were appointed as headteacher in September 2017 and have restructured the workforce to create a stronger senior team. You have accurately identified a decline in some aspects of the school's work. You and your leaders have worked together with the local schools and the local authority to improve provision. As a result, the progress made by current pupils is becoming stronger. However, some leaders only started their new roles this academic year and it is too early to determine the impact of some of these changes to secure the good quality of education in the school.

You have brought a fresh pair of eyes to help staff reflect and improve their practice. Alongside other staff members, you have strengthened the caring and nurturing environment of the school. Relationships between adults and pupils are positive. Adults are responsive to pupils' needs. The support provided for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties is good. Consequently, pupils respond quickly when directed by adults, supporting their strong attitudes to learning. Parents welcome and appreciate the care provided by the school. One parent typified the views of others by writing, 'From office staff, teachers and teaching assistants, it is certainly a caring school where my children are thriving.'

Pupils are confident and enjoy school. They speak enthusiastically about the different ways they learn and how teachers make learning fun. One pupil who spoke about his learning said, 'We play lots of games to warm up our maths brain.' Opportunities are provided to develop skills of responsibility, whether it is as young leaders or as members of either the school or eco council. This contributes well to pupils' social development.

You and your leaders have responded positively to addressing issues identified at the previous inspection. New assessment systems have been introduced to check pupils' progress through the year. Regular meetings with the teachers make use of this information to identify any pupils who are falling behind. Pupils receive extra teaching to help them catch up. You have worked with other local schools on a frequent basis to moderate your assessment information. The support you have received from the local authority has confirmed that teachers' assessments are accurate. Teachers use their assessments to plan work for pupils. However, you have identified that teachers do not set sufficient challenging tasks to help more pupils achieve the higher standards.

Leaders' actions are improving the teaching of mathematics. Teachers have been provided with additional training to help them use the school's chosen approach to teaching mathematics. However, in 2017, attainment dipped in mathematics and was below the national average at the end of key stage 1. This formed one of the areas of focus for this inspection and is commented on in the 'Inspection findings' section of this letter.

Governors share your high expectations for the achievement of pupils. They are committed to helping the school improve. Governors have responded to a recent review of governance carried out by the local authority. They have established new committees and developed a yearly plan for checking the school's work. Governors have ensured that there are more representatives from the parent body to provide a wider perspective on their work. However, governors recognise that they are not confident about holding school leaders to account. Governors' minutes show that they ask questions, but they do not check the responses they receive. Leaders' improvement plans are not precise about the timescales of their actions. Consequently, the challenge of governors is not as rigorous as it could be.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leaders place a high priority on safeguarding in the school. Four members of the staff are trained as designated leaders for child protection. This ensures that there is good expertise to respond to any concerns raised by staff. The vigilance of staff is supported through regular training so that they understand their safeguarding responsibilities well. They readily report concerns, confident in the knowledge that leaders respond and act quickly. Records relating to child protection are detailed and well maintained. You and your leaders are knowledgeable about your school community and you liaise with external agencies for support when it is needed. Systems for checking the suitability of staff who work at the school are well organised and fit for purpose.

Pupils say they are happy and safe at Clipstone Brook. Routines are well established, allowing pupils to move around the building safely. They understand how to be safe when they are using the internet. This is because the school teaches these aspects of safety through assemblies and class lessons. Pupils say that bullying is rare, but they are confident that adults would listen and respond to their concerns. All staff and parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaires agreed that children are safe at the school.

Inspection findings

- For my first line of enquiry, I wanted to find out how leaders ensured that pupils made sustained progress across all year groups. This is because the school caters for pupils up to Year 4 and there is no published information for key stage 2.
- We visited classes to observe teaching and check pupils' workbooks. In the early years, children make a good start to their education. This is because leaders use assessment information well to plan activities that support children's development. For example, children were using different activities to improve their skills needed for forming letter shapes. The proportion of children achieving the good level of development continues to improve and was above the national average in 2018.
- There is a systematic and consistent approach to the teaching of phonics. Our observations showed that phonics is taught proficiently. Adults use a range of resources effectively to help pupils use the letter sounds well. Pupils read books to practise their skills and apply their knowledge of phonics to improve the fluency of their reading. The school assessments show that pupils are making good progress in reading across the school. In a few instances, teachers do not insist that pupils use their phonics to help them spell unfamiliar words in their written work.
- The writing in pupils' books is variable across the school. Handwriting skills are not consistently taught, making some pupils' work difficult to read. Some teachers have low expectations of how much writing pupils complete in their book. This means that pupils are not developing resilience and writing stamina. The most able pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to extend and apply their writing skills at a higher standard. Your own school assessments show that progress in writing is inconsistent across different year groups.
- Secondly, I wanted to focus on how leaders have addressed weaknesses in mathematics identified at the previous inspection. This is because, in 2017, the proportion of pupils attaining the expected standards and greater depth showed that attainment at key stage 1 was below the national averages.
- Your leaders have introduced new approaches to the teaching of mathematics. We visited classes to see mathematics being taught. Teachers use assessment well to check what pupils know. The teaching makes good use of the school's chosen approach to develop pupils' understanding of mastery. Work in books shows pupils' confidence in mathematics improving by developing pupils' reasoning skills to check their knowledge. For example, pupils made effective use of number lines to identify the position and value of different numbers. However, work did not readily challenge the most able pupils, who often repeated skills they already

knew before being provided with different tasks.

- A third line of enquiry was to check how effectively leaders used additional government funding to support the progress of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.
- Leaders use pupil premium funding well to support the progress of disadvantaged pupils. You have accurately identified key actions to address the barriers to learning faced by these pupils. A wide range of interventions are well targeted to meet the different needs of disadvantaged pupils. For example, early speech and language intervention is helping children to develop their communication and language skills so that they make a good start at school. However, there are no actions in your strategy to support the most able disadvantaged pupils. Evidence from the inspection showed that teachers sometimes do not provide tasks that challenge this group of pupils.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points. Leaders' plans show how the needs of pupils are met through actions and interventions agreed with class teachers. Your leaders use their knowledge well to train staff so that they are clear about the expectations of the support and provision. Leaders' evaluations show that almost all pupils achieve their individual targets, ensuring that their progress is good.
- My final line of enquiry looked at how leaders' actions encouraged pupils to attend school regularly. This is because attendance of pupils has been below the national average for three years. Since your appointment, you have rightly placed a strong emphasis on tackling attendance. You have clear systems that notify parents when attendance becomes a concern. Leaders meet with parents to discuss concerns and, where possible, provide support to help children's attendance improve. Rewards and incentives are provided for pupils who attend school frequently. Classes eagerly await the news of best weekly attenders and who will receive ownership of the attendance bear. Attendance showed a slight improvement in 2018, and persistent absence has declined. You have identified that you need to continue to use your procedures to further improve rates of attendance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvement plans provide precise details about when targets should be met so that leaders are held to account for the school's improvement
- governors understand how they use information from leaders to check the progress that the school is making
- teachers have high expectations of pupils to apply the handwriting and spelling skills they have learned to every lesson and across different subjects
- teachers use assessment information to plan activities that challenge the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, to achieve the higher standards
- attendance improves so that it is line with the national average by continuing to

use the systems and procedures that have already been introduced.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Mellors
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you, your leaders who have responsibility for mathematics and special educational needs, and your office manager to discuss attendance. I met with two governors, including the chair, and a representative from the local authority. I visited classes across the school with you and looked at samples of pupils' work, observed the teaching of mathematics and spoke to pupils. I met with a group of eight pupils from key stage 2 and also spoke to a group of disadvantaged pupils.

I took account of 36 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, including 26 free-text responses. I considered 24 staff questionnaires, including the school's own information from parents and pupils' surveys. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan and the pupil premium strategy. I viewed information about pupils' attainment and progress. I scrutinised the safeguarding documents and I undertook a review of the school's website.