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Mrs Sharon Hillyard
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Hillyard

Short inspection of Exhall Cedars Infant 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 June 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 section 5 inspection.

Since the last inspection, you have continued to improve the quality of teaching and learning so that pupils achieve the best possible outcomes. You and school leaders continually reflect on your practice to ensure that you are meeting pupils' needs as effectively as you can. Staff work together well and help each other to improve. The relationships between staff and pupils are strong, so pupils are confident learners. You and your staff have high expectations for all pupils. You support pupils well so that all pupils can feel successful. As a result, pupils make exceptional progress from very low starting points, and standards have risen.

Governors are highly effective and are fully involved in the strategic direction of the school. They visit school regularly as part of their monitoring cycle and are well informed. They use their skills and expertise to good effect so that they have a very well-rounded view of the school. They have a clear understanding of the school's

strengths and priorities for development. They analyse pupils' progress and attainment and look at pupils' work so that they can check the impact of leaders' work on pupils' outcomes for themselves. They monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of additional funding such as the pupil premium and sports premium funding and hold leaders to account.

Parents and carers spoken to during the inspection have very positive views of the school. They value the support both they and their children receive academically and emotionally. Most parents agree that their children are doing well and make good progress.

Pupils behave well and demonstrate a love of learning. In lessons, they are fully focused on their work. As they move through school, they take a greater responsibility for their own learning, editing their work and helping each other. They play together well at breaktimes, but there is little for them to do, so many race around, which causes some to fall. The new play equipment, which is due to open soon, will provide a greater opportunity for pupils to be better engaged at breaktimes. However, some pupils could be helped to channel their energy more productively by being provided with a range of age-appropriate outdoor activities.

Support from the local authority is light touch because it judges Exhall Cedars to be a good school. However, you benefit from working closely with your local consortium of schools, where you have the opportunity to share best practice and drive further improvement.

You have addressed the areas for improvement from your last inspection successfully so that both the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils have improved, especially for the most able pupils. You have revised your topics so that they are more appealing to boys. You have introduced a wider range of quality texts and resources, including non-fiction books. You have reviewed your timetable and trained staff so that they are now more confident in their teaching, for example, of poetry. As a high number of pupils join the school with poor language skills, you have placed a great emphasis on developing pupils' ability to communicate well.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The culture of safeguarding in school is very strong and is a high priority. Around school there are posters with clear reminders about safeguarding, with relevant contact details for staff and visitors to use, if necessary. You ensure that staff are well trained and regularly updated with safeguarding guidance. You check their understanding frequently. Staff are vigilant and keep a close eye on pupils, especially the most vulnerable. The leaders for safeguarding meet regularly to discuss safeguarding concerns so that pupils do not 'slip through the net'. You have clear and thorough procedures in place for the recruitment of staff and the reporting of concerns. You work well with other agencies and, if necessary, will escalate your concerns in a timely manner.

Pupils know that if they have a worry, they can speak to an adult in school. In assembly, pupils discussed how their body might feel if something wasn't right, for example butterflies in their tummy. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online by using a safe search engine. They say that they would not give their personal details to a stranger. Most parents agree that their children are safe in school.

Inspection findings

- Pupils' attainment in writing at the end of key stage 1 has not been as high as in reading and mathematics. However, each year it has continued to rise, especially at greater depth. Pupils make strong progress because teaching is highly effective. Pupils plan their writing visually and rehearse it orally to help them in their writing. For example, they create 'story maps' in pictures to help them remember the sequence of a story. Pupils write at length and apply their phonics skills very well. Teachers address misconceptions promptly so that learning is moved on effectively and no learning time is lost. The least able pupils are well supported so that they can be successful and make progress. The most able pupils are challenged and apply grammatical features and punctuation to good effect in their writing. For example, they use speech marks and choose adventurous adjectives and adverbs. Pupils write with confidence and read their work back well. They explain their understanding articulately because teachers have secured pupils' skills and knowledge well. As pupils move through the school, they spot their own mistakes and correct them independently. For some pupils, especially the less able, the quality of handwriting and presentation is not as good as it could be.
- Phonics is taught well because teachers have good subject knowledge and are well trained. They model sounds effectively to pupils and have high expectations so that pupils pronounce sounds correctly. Teachers take every opportunity to develop pupils' early reading skills. In the early years, teachers show children how to write sentences and help them to build words with sounds. In other writing lessons, teachers discuss the application of phonics when spelling words. They also expect pupils to spell everyday words, such as the days of the week, accurately and to use the examples provided in the classroom. Pupils are confident to apply their phonics skills when reading and writing unfamiliar words. One pupil said, 'You learn from your mistakes.' As a result of strong teaching in phonics, outcomes have continued to improve so that attainment is now above the national average.
- Attendance is below the national average. Leaders take a rigorous approach to improving attendance and make their expectations clear to parents at induction meetings, in their policy and in school newsletters. Leaders monitor pupils' attendance thoroughly and follow up absence promptly with letters and meetings with parents. Leaders reward and celebrate pupils' good or improving attendance with certificates, stickers and a mention in the school's newsletter. Attendance figures, however, continue to be affected by the number of families who persist in taking extended leave during term time.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- handwriting and presentation improve for some pupils, especially for the less able
- pupils are better engaged at break and lunchtimes so that they can play together more safely.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Cameron
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and your senior leadership team. I met with the chair of governors and two other members of the governing body. I spoke by telephone to a representative of the local authority. I spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day and considered the 10 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, including six written comments. I also considered the 20 responses to the pupil questionnaire and the 36 responses to the staff survey. I spoke to pupils informally during the day. I scrutinised a range of school documentation, including the single central record, safeguarding records, your school self-evaluation document and school improvement plan, minutes of governing body meetings, and assessment and attendance information. Together, we visited all classes and I looked at pupils' work. I observed pupils' behaviour throughout the day, before school, in lessons and at playtimes.