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Mr Simon Lane
Headteacher
Merridale Primary School
Aspen Way
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Dear Mr Lane

Short inspection of Merridale Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 25 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 your school was judged to be good in February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

In fact, standards in English and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 have risen. In 2018, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard for their age in reading, writing and mathematics was above average. This represents at least good progress for most pupils and is a commendable achievement. That said, there is still scope to lift standards higher in key stage 1 and provide greater, and more consistent, challenge to the most able pupils.

Your calm, attentive, consistent leadership and governors' oversight have enabled the school to consolidate and strengthen its effectiveness. Teaching continues to be successful, leadership potential in staff has been developed and pupils are kept safe and happy at school.

Parents say that they are pleased with the school's work and that they trust staff to sort out any problems that arise. You manage communication between home and school well. From the day children first start in Nursery until when they leave at the end of Year 6, parents are kept informed about school life and how to help their children at home.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff understand what to do if they have a concern about any member of

the school community, and they act promptly when required. School records show that information is handled correctly and shared with the right people at the right time. Leaders make sure that they carry out and record all the proper employment checks on staff in line with government guidance. Access into the school building is controlled and the school site is well maintained and kept secure during the day. Staff are informed about pupils with medical conditions and medicines in school are stored correctly and readily available if needed. Plenty of staff have first aid qualifications, fire-safety routines are in place and school trips are risk assessed. Staff keep a record of any poor behaviour and rare instances of bullying are dealt with quickly and constructively.

Parents say that they have confidence in the school's systems for safeguarding their children. Inspection evidence supports this view.

Inspection findings

- The majority of children start school with a level of knowledge and skill below that typical for their age. In addition, many speak little or no English. However, whatever their starting points, the Terrific for Twos centres and Nursery provision ensure that children settle in quickly, make good progress and develop an interest in school life and learning. Close links, and some shared working spaces, between the school's Nursery and Reception classes assist a smooth learning journey through the early years. Both early years classes are very well organised with lots of equipment and inviting areas and activities. These encourage children to investigate, question, discuss, imagine and create. In addition, a strong focus on early literacy and numeracy sets the foundations for later successes. During this inspection, for example, when children were making model hedgehogs out of clay and pasta, adults prompted children to count the hedgehogs' spikes and think about all the different words they could use to describe their creations. In the Reception class, children were clearly spellbound by the end-of-the-day story time. They listened with fascinated attention and were quick to respond to the teacher's questions about words and characters. There is no doubt that teaching in the early years is attentive and responsive to children's different needs. While the proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year remains below average, it has risen over time and represents good progress across the early years phase.
- The close attention to reading and vocabulary is supported by effective phonics teaching that continues into key stage 1. This is reflected in pupils' consistently favourable results in the Year 1 phonics screening check. Indeed, the school has put a lot of thought and effort into the teaching of reading. In every class, pupils read regularly, are read to by adults, and study different types of text. All of this helps to improve their reading and writing skills. In Year 1, for instance, teaching based on the familiar story of 'Jack and the Beanstalk' prompted pupils to act out key scenes in order to help them understand how to sequence their writing. This active involvement was exciting and helped to fix ideas in pupils' minds. It also helped the teacher to see who understood and to provide extra help as needs be.
- In key stage 1 and lower key stage 2, staff introduce pupils to new and unusual words and make sure they understand what they mean. However, at times, the

pitch of work is not quite right, or resources are not ideal. For example, in two sessions that I saw during this inspection, text on the interactive whiteboard was very small and pupils could not see it. Elsewhere, some pupils were asked to find certain words in a section of writing but could do it easily and started to lose interest. Other inspection evidence indicates that this is not commonplace, but there is still room to tighten up these aspects of teaching and learning and lift standards higher, particularly at the end of key stage 1.

- Throughout key stage 2, the whole-school approach to reading and words continues to be evident in classroom practice and the many displays about books and literature that adorn the walls. Teachers emphasise the importance of subject-specific vocabulary and regularly check that pupils understand the concepts that sit behind words, such as 'glacier' or 'crevasse', for example. In fact, teaching draws heavily on knowledge learned in one subject to support learning in another. Whether learning about different types of pollution, the life of Roald Dahl or the motivations behind the actions of Shakespeare's 'Macbeth', teaching prompts pupils to apply previous learning to new situations. The school's attention to reading has clearly been a factor in pushing standards higher at the end of key stage 2. Indeed, for the past three years, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard for their age in reading has risen and, most recently, was above average. That said, the school's heavily structured approach to reading and writing can, at times, restrict the output of some of the most able pupils.
- In mathematics, standards at the end of key stage 2 have been above average for three years running. Work in pupils' books showed and my conversations with pupils found that new work builds logically on earlier work. I also found that pupils get a lot of work done and understand how well they are doing. The most able mathematicians get plenty of opportunities to exercise their minds, apply what they know and succeed with numerous and varied challenges. Given the current quality of mathematics teaching and the evident capabilities of the most able pupils, there is clearly potential to push to above average the proportions reaching above age-related expectations.
- Like other pupils, disadvantaged pupils do well at this school. Evidence gathered during this inspection did not pinpoint any one strategy or approach that is driving this positive trend. However, leaders have used pupil premium money to support, train and coach teachers to reflect on and improve their day-to-day teaching. Furthermore, the school has allocated time and funds to taking pupils out and about on what are called 'Merridale memory days'. These memory days involve pupils climbing hills, visiting the theatre and seaside in order to widen their experiences and interests.
- Another simple, yet highly effective, initiative has been the creation of parent ambassadors, who act as an extra link between home and school. These bilingual parent members of staff are at the school gates each morning and afternoon so that parents can speak with them. They help to overcome any language barriers or other difficulties that may hinder parents' communication with school. This supportive and listening relationship between home and school helps to build trust. It also ensures that school staff and leaders are soon alert to any problems and can find ways to help. The unanimously positive comments entered into

Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, during the inspection echoed the appreciative comments parents made to me on the playground.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- standards at the end of key stage 1 are lifted higher by making sure that work is pitched and supported at the right level
- teaching across the school provides sufficient opportunities for the most able pupils to develop their initiative and creativity, so that they reach even higher standards.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Pye
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and other members of the leadership team and staff. I also met with three governors and a local authority representative.

I carried out short observations of teaching in different year groups and looked at pupils' work in books and on display. I talked with pupils in lessons and at lunchtime and met with a small group to talk about school life and work. I spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day.

I paid particular attention to several key lines of enquiry. These included: pupils' achievement in reading and mathematics; the progress of disadvantaged pupils; safeguarding; and the impact of leadership and management on school improvement.

By the end of the inspection, there were 13 recent responses on Parent View and 11 written comments. I took account of these responses and also considered 17 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. I looked at several documents, including: the school's own evaluation of its performance; assessment records; external reports about the school; information from school leaders' checks on teaching and learning; pupils' records; and several school policy documents. I also checked the school's website and the procedures for keeping pupils safe.