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Mr Dean Marshall
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Marshall

Short inspection of Mill Hill Primary 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 Mill Hill Primary School was judged to be good in November 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 the school's last inspection, you have demonstrated firm leadership. As a result of good teaching, pupils achieve well over time. The 2018 outcomes for pupils by the end of key stage 2 demonstrate noteworthy improvement. For example, the proportion of pupils attaining the expected and higher standards in reading, writing, grammar, punctuation and spelling, and in mathematics, improved to be above the national averages for all pupils. Disadvantaged pupils attained at least in line with the national average, at the expected standard for reading, writing and mathematics, and in mathematics and grammar, punctuation and spelling at the higher standards.

You are supported well by your senior leadership team and governors, who are all ambitious, so that pupils experience the best possible education. Along with leaders, including governors, you have accurately identified the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. Leaders' self-evaluation of the school and improvement planning clearly identify the correct priorities for improving the school further. Senior leaders challenge, and support, teaching staff so that they provide consistently high-quality teaching. This effective approach ensures that pupils benefit from teaching and learning that is consistently strong across the school.

We discussed how the school uses targeted interventions in phonics, reading and

mathematics to improve the attainment of pupils who have gaps in their learning. You stated that these interventions have improved attainment across school. Leaders have identified that there are some inconsistencies in attainment for the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils across school. We analysed pupils' attainment and confirmed that this was accurate. You have correctly identified the need to further improve outcomes for the most able pupils across school, including the most able disadvantaged pupils.

Since the last inspection, leaders, staff and governors have successfully tackled those areas identified. Leaders were asked to raise attainment and develop the early years curriculum so that children had more freedom to investigate and find out things for themselves. The leadership team and early years staff have worked together successfully. As a result, they have put in place a new curriculum that helps children to develop the skills that they need in reading, writing and mathematics. Children are also provided with opportunities to be curious, and to investigate and find out new things independently. As a result of these changes, children's outcomes by the end of Reception have improved each year for the last four years and is now well above the national average at the expected good level of development.

Another area identified for improvement at the time of the last inspection was to improve the way pupils use their writing skills in all subjects across the curriculum. In response to this, you made several changes to the way in which English is taught across the school. One of your first actions was to ensure that all pupils are taught in mixed-ability groups. You also introduced a new approach to improve pupils' drafting skills, the explicit teaching of grammar, punctuation and spelling and an insistence on the non-negotiable skills that pupils must use in English. These changes have all led to, and supported, improvements in pupils' attainment in writing across the curriculum. This can be seen in the provisional key stage 2 outcomes for 2018, where pupils' progress, including disadvantaged pupils' progress, in writing is above average.

At key stage 1, leaders and staff carefully reviewed the curriculum provision for boys' writing. The decision was made to change the texts used to support writing. As a result, boys' attainment in writing by the end of key stage 1 in 2018 was well above the expected standard, and such standards are evident in current pupils' writing books.

Mill Hill Primary School is an inclusive school. Pupils, parents and carers, staff and governors all agree it is a special place to learn. Pupils know they are special. One pupil shared with the inspector, 'It doesn't matter who you are, or what you have been through – you are welcome here.'

Safeguarding is effective

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You and your governing body give high priority to keeping pupils safe. Subsequently, there is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. Leaders carry out appropriately stringent checks on staff, and governors, to ensure that they are all suitable to work with pupils. Record-keeping is rigorous and exemplary. You ensure that all staff and governors receive regular and appropriate training, including about how to protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism. Leaders and staff work effectively with parents and other agencies to take prompt action if any concerns about a pupil's welfare arise. Staff, therefore, know how to perform their duties in protecting pupils and keeping them safe.

Pupils spoken with feel safe in school and know how to keep safe. They have a good awareness of internet safety. Pupils understand what forms bullying can take and, if they have a problem, they know that staff will help them sort it out. In the classroom and at playtime, pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They are polite, respectful and have positive attitudes to learning.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive and proud of their children's school. They value the welcoming ethos of the school. Parents state that the school keeps them well informed of their child's progress. They appreciate the breakfast and after-school club and the educational visits provided by the school.

Inspection Findings

- During the inspection, I wanted to find out about the new early years curriculum. Leaders now have a themed approach across the different learning areas, such as a Halloween theme. We observed that this approach helps pupils make good progress in adult-led and independent activities. Staff model learning by using visual prompts, numbers and words. Children then use these well to support their own learning. Adults' questioning skills are strong. The new approach to questioning of 'what if?' 'how can we?' and 'how could I change?' is evident in areas of learning. A child mixing a potion using different coloured paint was, after careful questioning, able to explain, 'I made dark green by mixing together yellow and blue.' The children are inquisitive and have a good vocabulary. For example, one group of boys could explain what 'spooky' meant and how the word made them feel.
- Resources in the early years are carefully organised to encourage children's independence. Every child thoughtfully engaged in the activity they were completing. Opportunities to reinforce children's knowledge of number were evident in the classes based on numbers 0 to 11, although we agreed that the most able children would have benefited from more challenging numbers.
- I met with your early years leader, who shared that access to professional development had allowed staff to collaboratively develop a curriculum that suited the children's interests in the school. All early years staff meet weekly, and plan together the next steps for children. These discussions help identify children who need additional support or further challenge. I looked at learning journals for children that clearly showed that they make good progress, and that they take

pride in their work. If a child does not achieve a good level of development at the end of Reception, the learning journal is passed to the Year 1 teacher to ensure that there is a continuity in the curriculum to meet the child's needs. We discussed that in 2018 the number of children who exceeded a good level of development was in line with the most recent national average. You have identified through your actions that more children need to exceed the early learning goals.

- Your subject leaders for English were clear that professional development opportunities have enabled them to support staff in the school's approach to improving pupils' skills in writing. These leaders shared with me how the agreed approach to teaching writing has been effective in supporting improved attainment in writing across the curriculum. As a result of your changed approach, improvements to pupils' grammar, spelling and punctuation skills have improved pupils' writing outcomes. At the end of key stage 2, in 2018, in grammar, spelling and punctuation, attainment at both expected and the higher score was at least in line with the national average for all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged.
- Together we also explored the current progress boys had made in writing at key stage 1. We agreed that the presentation of pupils' work and the quality of writing showed how changing the texts used to support writing in Year 2 had impacted substantially on boys' attainment.
- With the science and English leaders, I looked at science workbooks from Year 3 and Year 6 pupils. Pupils' work was very well presented and these books demonstrated how effectively pupils transfer their English skills to other subjects. I conducted a further work scrutiny of a sample of pupils' history, geography and religious education workbooks from Year 1, Year 2, Year 4 and Year 5. Pupils' presentation was of a very high standard and the workbooks demonstrated how pupils' English skills are consistently used well in these curriculum areas.
- We visited a targeted mathematics intervention session for a small group of Year 5 pupils based on rounding up and down numbers to the nearest 10. The use of practical apparatus and high-quality questions supported a pupil in rounding 54 down to 50, for example. The pupil then used this skill to round up higher numbers successfully.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a higher proportion of children in the early years exceed a good level of development
- the most able pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are challenged consistently across school.

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

Yours sincerely

Frances Gowland
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you and other leaders, including governors. I held meetings with your leaders for English, science and early years. I met with a representative from the local authority. I completed a joint work scrutiny with the leaders of English and science. I completed a scrutiny of pupils' work in history, geography and religious education (RE). I looked at children's learning journals in Reception. I observed pupils at playtime and met with a group of 12 pupils from across school. I visited three classes in the school and one mathematics intervention session. I scrutinised a range of documentation relating to safeguarding, bullying, exclusions, child protection referrals and attendance. I considered 37 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, the school's parental survey results for 2018 and the views of 26 members of staff.