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Mr Simon Hanley
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hanley

Short inspection of Plantation Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 November 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 October 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your vision for the school is widely shared. Your curriculum delivers the promotion of empathy and opportunity effectively. It provides your pupils with an understanding and appreciation of all aspects of equality.

You and your leadership team have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Your evaluation is accurate. The school's development plan focuses on raising attainment and progress by continually improving the quality of teaching. Middle leaders are driving the school's improvements with tenacity, as a result of effective training and coaching. They are also highly effective teachers.

The learning environment is calm, with a purposeful working 'buzz' in every classroom. There is a welcoming and warm feeling to the school, with strong relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils spoke of 'fun lessons' and appreciate the rewards that leaders have introduced to promote good behaviour. The pupils I spoke to told me that behaviour is good almost all of the time. They were unable to recount any incidents of racist or homophobic bullying.

Governors are all extremely committed and passionate for this school to be the best it can be. They are aware of the school's many strengths and equally clear about the areas that need to be further improved. Governors have a wide range of skills. They receive useful and timely information to allow them to carry out their roles, including holding senior leaders to account for the quality of teaching and the

progress that pupils make. Governors have also built effective relationships with middle leaders that enable them to challenge and support in equal measure.

Parents and carers spoke highly of the school. They said that teachers are approachable and supportive. They told me that behaviour in the school is good and that their children are safe and well cared for. Parents are particularly proud of the swift manner in which staff deal with issues raised. Several parents commented very favourably about all the transition arrangements, into school, through school and onto high school. The vast majority of parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, said that they would recommend the school.

Pupils told me that they enjoy coming to school and recognise the importance of attending regularly. They were eager to discuss the many exciting opportunities that they have, for example, on residential visits. They recall their learning from, and understand the importance of, special weeks, such as 'Black History Week'. Pupils clearly enjoy the many extra-curricular clubs that run, such as for gymnastics, computing and multi-skills. Pupils recognise and appreciate the school's efforts to promote equality in all its forms – a recurring comment from pupils spoken to during the inspection was: 'We are a school where we all respect each other'.

You were asked at the previous inspection to improve the quality of teaching further to enable more pupils to make outstanding progress. You and your leadership team have revised the school's systems to monitor pupils' achievements and better hold teachers to account for the standards of attainment and progress of the pupils. This, alongside high-quality training and coaching, has contributed to an improvement in the quality of teaching. However, middle-attaining pupils could achieve even more.

In the past, disadvantaged pupils have not made the progress that they are capable of in writing and mathematics. Following the national results in 2018, you arranged for a review of the way that pupil premium funding is used to support these pupils. While you use the funding effectively to bring to life your vision of equality and opportunity for all, the focus on the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils lacks precision. The planning of learning activities and the monitoring of the effectiveness of this support have not been sharp enough to enable the disadvantaged pupils to make the best possible progress in writing and mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose. Leaders and governors fulfil statutory requirements when appointing new members of staff. Leaders are tenacious in their work to protect vulnerable pupils. Parents and pupils spoken to during the inspection said that the school is a safe place.

Leaders, including governors, ensure that staff receive high-quality training and appropriate updates throughout the year. As a result, staff know how to recognise the signs and symptoms of abuse. Staff are very clear about the school's procedures

for reporting and recording any concerns they have regarding the safeguarding of pupils.

Pupils are taught about how to keep themselves safe. Leaders have introduced and implemented clear programmes to teach pupils about personal and internet safety. As a result, pupils understand the dangers associated with internet use and report concerns to staff.

Inspection findings

- Children enter Plantation Community Primary School with knowledge and skills below those typical for their age. Through effective teaching and support for identified groups and individuals, children make strong progress and achieve well by the end of the early years foundation stage. By the end of key stage 1, pupils' attainment is in line with national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. During key stage 2, pupils make good progress over time in reading and mathematics, but weaker progress in writing compared with national averages. Disadvantaged pupils make good progress in reading, but weaker progress in writing and mathematics when compared with that of other pupils nationally.
- My first line of enquiry looked at what leaders are doing to improve the attendance and persistent absence of all pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Effective monitoring of attendance and specific approaches taken with individual families have reduced the number of unexplained and unauthorised absences. Leaders use a wide range of strategies, including home visits, to support their challenge to families to improve attendance. Incentives for high levels of attendance reward pupils, including with gold, silver and bronze awards. These, together with aspirational targets (above the national average), demonstrate a strong commitment from leaders to raise the school's attendance rates and reduce the number of children with persistent absence. While there has been some success, leaders have not achieved their challenging attendance targets.
- My second line of enquiry concerned finding out what you have done to improve writing, particularly for middle-attaining pupils. You have introduced a writing project with the Year 6 classes to further improve the quality of teaching. You have also agreed a consistent set of criteria to monitor pupils' writing. These together have helped to develop improved expectations of what pupils can achieve. You have also given a greater focus to independent editing, drafting of writing and the application of grammar to pupils' writing. As a result of your work, all of these strategies have combined to enable older pupils to produce writing of an improving quality.
- Pupils' writing shows good progress since the beginning of the year. In Years 5 and 6, the creative placing of words and phrases adds further interest for the reader. Pupils' books show their use of vocabulary and repetition to create imagery and atmosphere. In Years 3 and 4, pupils are experimenting with a wider range of punctuation and using more effective vocabulary. Younger pupils use their phonic knowledge to spell words; they usually spell common words correctly. While your work to develop writing has resulted in some improvements,

sentence structures have not improved as quickly, particularly for middle-attaining pupils. Younger pupils rely on familiar structures in their writing. Older pupils' sentence structures are inconsistent. Although they are attempting more complex sentences, they are not able to punctuate them correctly.

- A third line of enquiry focused on the progress and attainment of pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding. In 2017 and 2018, progress for these pupils was weaker than for similar pupils nationally. As a result, you recently commissioned a pupil premium review and have already included the findings in the school's improvement plans.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to 'live out' the school's vision for inclusion. Disadvantaged pupils benefit from these activities, which enrich the school's curriculum and give all pupils opportunities and experiences such as residential visits, high-quality drama and music. Staff also provide effective social and emotional support to enable these pupils to develop their resilience and to further improve their skills in reading, writing and mathematics. However, some of these interventions are not sharply focused on the specific needs of the pupils involved. Leaders do not monitor the effectiveness of this support with sufficient precision.
- My final key line of enquiry considered the progress and attainment of the most able pupils. In response to an analysis of the 2017 national data, leaders identified that high prior attaining pupils were not making good progress or attaining the higher levels. Leaders now monitor their current attainment and progress better. Provisional published data in 2018 and school information for current pupils show that greater proportions of the most able pupils are making good progress and attaining the higher levels expected in school.
- Strategies introduced to improve pupils' writing are beginning to have a positive impact on standards. Teachers have taught pupils how to edit and improve their writing independently. Teachers' higher expectations of sentence structure and the inclusion of the features of various types of writing are leading to increasing numbers of the most able pupils reaching even higher standards. Pupils' books show controlled vocabulary use. This creates the appropriate atmosphere, as well as an imaginative use of connectives and other linguistic devices to add interest to their writing.
- In mathematics, leaders have raised their expectations of pupils' reasoning and mathematical thinking. This is having a positive effect on pupils' deepening understanding of mathematics, particularly of the most able pupils. Pupils' books show that mathematical learning includes greater challenge, with higher teacher expectations. Pupils are tackling more complex mathematical questions successfully.
- Most-able pupils read with intonation and confidence. They have good strategies to read unknown words. Their developing vocabulary enables them to have a good guess at the meaning of them. Their comprehension skills are developing in structure and detail. Teachers have adapted the curriculum to include more opportunities to use and develop their comprehension and inference skills. This is resulting in more pupils working at the higher standards.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to improve progress and attainment for middle-attaining and disadvantaged pupils through:
 - a sharper focus on the specific needs of these pupils
 - closer monitoring of the effectiveness of the support given to these pupils
 - the implementation of the findings of the recent pupil premium review
- continue to monitor and improve the attendance, persistent absence and punctuality of all pupil groups.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Shackleton
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your staff and members of the governing body. I also met with pupils to seek their views about the school. I spoke with a representative from the local authority and the school's improvement adviser. I also spoke with pupils informally in the classroom and at lunchtime.

We observed teaching and learning together in various classes. I scrutinised the writing and the mathematics of the most able pupils in Years 2, 4 and 6, and the writing of middle prior attaining pupils. In addition, I spoke to pupils in Years 2, 4 and 6 about their reading and listened to them read.

I examined and discussed a range of documents, including those relating to attendance and safeguarding. I looked at the school's self-evaluation and improvement priorities, its pupil premium report and its assessment information.

I considered the views expressed by parents gathered in the playground before the start of the school day and 31 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I also considered the 23 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and four responses to the pupil questionnaire.