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Mrs Angela Hannaway
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Dear Mrs Hannaway

Short inspection of Gig Mill Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 11 December 2018 with Heather Phillips HMI, 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 September 2013.

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 be a section 5 inspection.

The school motto, 'Together we care, together we succeed', has now become a reality across the school. Since you became headteacher in January 2014, you have ensured that every child succeeds academically in an environment where their well-being is at the heart of your drive for improvement. Standards across the school have risen and the progress pupils make is now much stronger. For example, in writing, progress has improved over the last three years from being below the national average to above the national average.

Since the last inspection the school building has been remodelled and extended to accommodate a significant rise in pupil numbers. A new headteacher and 14 new teachers have been appointed. As a result of the governing body reconstituting, three original governors remain, a new chair was elected in January 2017 and three new governors were appointed.

Leadership is the key strength of the school. This is a result of the determined and highly effective leadership provided by you and your deputy headteacher and your

ability to develop and empower other staff. Middle leaders are also highly effective. They are enthusiastic and demonstrate a good understanding of school improvement. They, like you, take a strategic approach to developing and improving the quality of teaching in their subject areas. Your self-evaluation of the school is accurate and identifies the priorities for development. All leaders have detailed, comprehensive action plans which they use to drive further improvement. Actions are carefully monitored at regular intervals. The cycle of school improvement is deeply embedded at all levels.

There is a very strong shared commitment to wanting the best for every child. You ensure that all staff have access to high-quality training. This is improving the quality of teaching across the school. Staff welcome the support and challenge that is provided. They are reflective and fully committed to developing their professional skills and deepening their subject knowledge. This approach is very successful in ensuring consistency across the school. This has been especially important as the school has expanded.

Governance has improved significantly over time. The business-like approach now in place enables governors to focus on school development and improving pupil outcomes. They use their wealth of skills and expertise effectively to hold leaders to account. Through their regular meetings and visits to the school, they continually update their knowledge of the strengths of the school and areas for further development. Governors ensure that actions taken have a positive impact on pupils' academic attainment as well as their well-being. Governors are committed to the school and proud to be part of the school community.

Pupils' behaviour is impeccable. Conduct across the school during the inspection was of the highest standard. Pupils are confident, curious and have well-developed, positive attitudes to learning. Those who spoke to the inspector say that they like the way in which people think differently; pupils are respectful and inclusive. As a result of the very strong provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, pupils' understanding of British values is exceptionally well developed. Pupils say that British values 'enable you to be whoever you want to be'. They are aspirational for themselves and their friends. Many parents comment positively on the inclusive nature of the school and the fact that their children are well cared for.

The areas identified at the last inspection have been thoroughly addressed. As a result of improvements in the teaching of phonics, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard at the end of Year 1 has risen from 38% to 90%. From an early age, pupils use their phonics knowledge to write independently and quickly develop the skills needed to write fluently and neatly. You tackled the legacy of poor attendance by changing the culture across the school. No holidays in term-time are authorised and you are tenacious in following up any absence from school. Attendance is now above the national average.

Safeguarding is effective.

'Tell until someone listens, tell until someone does something about it' is deeply

embedded in the culture of safeguarding across the school. You and your leadership team ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You know your families well and have an extensive knowledge of the issues facing the local community. The team of experienced, knowledgeable designated safeguarding leaders follow up every concern to ensure that vulnerable children and their families receive timely and appropriate help. They build up strong relationships with parents and provide support, but challenge where appropriate, such as when pupils are late for school.

The curriculum provides a wealth of opportunities for pupils to learn how to keep themselves safe. For example, work on 'hands of trust' and the safe use of social media helps pupils to deal with issues as they arise. All staff are appropriately trained and understand their responsibility for keeping children safe. They check the class worry boxes daily and provide highly effective support to help pupils deal with any anxieties they may have.

Governors regularly check that safeguarding processes are followed appropriately. Record-keeping is comprehensive, appropriate and helps track the impact of actions taken. Thorough checks are undertaken when recruiting new staff. A comprehensive induction programme and mentoring support enable new staff to fully understand their responsibilities.

Inspection findings

- Children get a very good start to school. Strong provision is evident across the Nursery and Reception classes. High expectations from all adults enable children to develop the confidence to work independently. Children show resilience and an ability to concentrate for periods of time, thinking carefully about what they are doing. They are keen to share their learning: several of the Nursery children told inspectors all they knew about dinosaurs having sharp teeth and eating meat, and explained in great detail how incredibly big the dinosaurs were.
- Through regular discussions, children who are at risk of not making expected progress are identified. They are then provided with appropriate additional help and support. For example, speech and language support, play therapy and small group work to develop social and emotional skills help children to develop key skills and make better progress. Leaders ensure that support is provided at the earliest opportunity to enable children to reach a good level of development by the time they leave the Reception classes.
- The teaching of phonics is a strength of the school. Pupils use and apply their phonics knowledge when reading and writing independently. Inspectors wanted to check how leaders ensure that early reading skills are built upon and further developed. Leaders have ensured a strategic approach to the development of reading across the school. High-quality training enables staff to deepen their subject knowledge and confidence in teaching reading. Daily focused guided reading sessions provide opportunities for teachers to work with small groups and get to know their pupils as readers. Planned reading sessions are purposeful and ensure that pupils acquire reading skills, such as inference, deduction, skimming and scanning. Pupils reading journals indicate their ability to

comprehend what they are reading and give thoughtful, detailed responses to the texts they read. Reading journals indicate that pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are making strong progress in their reading.

- Developing a love of reading has also been given a high priority. Leaders have invested in new reading materials. High-quality and suitably challenging texts engage and interest pupils. Central to the reading strategy is a consistently strong focus on developing pupils' vocabulary. Adults make the most of every opportunity to ensure that pupils understand what they are reading. As a result, pupils can express themselves clearly and successfully interpret the challenging vocabulary in their reading books.
- A similar strategic approach to raising standards is now driving strong improvements in mathematics. Again, central to this drive for improvement is quality training for all staff and developing a love of mathematics in every pupil. Leaders are highly skilled in building success in this way. Staff demonstrate strong subject knowledge. They are more confident to teach pupils the skills to apply their mathematics knowledge and understanding to solve a range of problems. Pupils' work is carefully analysed in order to identify gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Adults ask probing questions to ensure that pupils explain in greater detail the reasons for what they are doing. Responses in pupils' books are of a high quality and comprehensive. They indicate that the decline in standards in mathematics has been reversed.
- This is a highly inclusive school. All staff understand their responsibilities in ensuring that every teacher is a teacher of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils with a range of complex and individual needs are supported effectively. The experienced and knowledgeable inclusion leader is skilled in checking the progress pupils make. Barriers to learning are identified. Support is timely and interventions are changed according to pupils' needs. Precision teaching is used well to secure key skills in areas such as reading, writing and number facts. Support staff rigorously track the small steps pupils make in developing their understanding. Interventions have a positive impact on pupil outcomes. For example, pupils who follow an 18-week reading programme make significant gains in their reading ability.
- 'Irresistible learning tailor made in the Midlands' is how leaders describe the thematic curriculum they have developed. The curriculum is rich and interesting, and provides every opportunity for all pupils to develop a full range of skills, knowledge and understanding over time. Leaders make best use of staff specialist skills, such as the ability to teach French, Spanish or music. Pupils are highly engaged and focused in their learning. They talk with enthusiasm about their work and parents are positive about the homework challenges that link to it. The school environment reflects the wide range of artistic, technological, scientific and creative opportunities provided through the curriculum. The broad, balanced curriculum widens pupils' horizons.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the new approaches in mathematics continue to be embedded so that pupils make even stronger progress and continue to develop the ability to reason and explain in great detail.

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

Yours sincerely

Nicola Harwood
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other leaders. The lead inspector met with two members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. A meeting was held with a representative of the local authority.

Inspectors, accompanied by the headteacher and deputy headteacher, made short visits to most classrooms and spoke to pupils informally. A group of pupils met with an inspector to talk about their learning more formally. Pupils' behaviour was observed in lessons and at break times. Their workbooks were scrutinised.

The team inspector spoke to parents at the start of the school day. 98 responses and more than 60 free-text comments on Parent View were considered. The lead inspector also considered the 49 responses to the staff questionnaire and the 61 responses to the pupil questionnaire.

Various school documents were scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation and information about pupils' progress, behaviour, attendance and safety. Documents relating to safeguarding were checked and the inspector looked at published information on the school's website.