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Mrs Deborah Sadler  
Headteacher  
Lower Heath C of E Primary School  
Lower Heath  
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Dear Mrs Sadler

### **Short inspection of Lower Heath C of E Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 6 December 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 March 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 your appointment in September 2016, you have worked hard to develop leadership roles across the school and to involve parents in their children's education. Staff and parents recognise the positive changes you have made. Pupils enjoy coming to school and attendance rates are high.

You and the associate assistant headteacher have established a warm and welcoming culture. You encourage parents to play an active role in their children's education. Fortnightly drop-in sessions to each class, 'community lunches' and regular workshops are indicative of your commitment to working in partnership with parents. As a result, parents feel welcome in school. Those spoken to during the inspection praised the school's 'family atmosphere' and how approachable staff are. 'I can't say enough good things' was typical of parents' comments. All of the parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, say their children are happy at school.

Pupils are confident learners who behave well. They listen attentively in lessons and apply themselves productively to tasks. Pupils are extremely positive about the school. They found it difficult to think of anything they would like to improve. Pupils value the many opportunities to take responsibility, for example as house captains, play equipment monitors, librarians and members of the school council. They have a strong understanding of Christian values and the school's 'seven Rs' – ready, responsible, reflective, resourceful, resilient, risk-taker and reasoning. Pupils are

caring and show respect for other people's views and beliefs.

You and the staff have made progress in addressing the areas for improvement from the last inspection. Teachers and teaching assistants now receive joint training to ensure that all staff have the necessary skills to support pupils' learning effectively. Adults make regular checks on pupils' learning in lessons and teaching assistants provide feedback to teachers about pupils' progress in intervention sessions. However, in mathematics, teachers do not adapt work sufficiently when pupils show they have misunderstood a concept or when tasks are too easy. Pupils' writing has improved and, in 2018, attainment at the end of key stages 1 and 2 rose to be in line with national averages. However, weaknesses in spelling persist and the proportion of pupils working at greater depth at the end of Year 2 remains low.

You and the associate assistant headteacher are not complacent. You have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have set about improving the quality of teaching in phonics and reading over the past two years. Consequently, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has risen from well below the national average in 2016 to above the national average in 2018. Similarly, pupils' attainment in reading at the end of key stages 1 and 2 has significantly improved to be above national averages in 2018. You have begun to make improvements to the wider curriculum. However, there is still work to do to ensure that pupils make strong progress in subjects such as science, history and geography.

Governors have a clear understanding of the school's work. They bring a breadth of experience and skills to their roles and challenge leaders increasingly effectively. Since your appointment, governors receive detailed information about pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching. This means that governors are better informed about what the school does well and what needs to improve. For example, governors are very aware that pupils' outcomes in mathematics need to improve with urgency.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders and governors have created a strong culture for safeguarding within the school. Staff receive regular training and updates, including a newsletter to keep the school's policies and procedures fresh in their minds. Leaders check staff's understanding and confidence and use what they find out to tailor training to their specific needs. Staff know individual pupils well and report any concerns they have about pupils' safety and welfare promptly. Leaders respond swiftly to these referrals and record thoroughly the actions they take to ensure that pupils are safe.

Pupils' well-being is a high priority and, as a result, pupils feel safe at school. They know how bullying differs from 'falling out' and say that bullying at Lower Heath C of E Primary School is rare. Pupils trust adults to resolve any issues that occur and are confident that they will help them if they are worried or upset.

Staff teach pupils how to stay safe in different situations. For example, during the inspection, pupils in Years 3 and 4 visited the local town to develop their understanding of pedestrian crossings, traffic lights and the hazards of parked vehicles. Pupils know how to stay safe when using the internet and say they would never share their personal details online.

## **Inspection findings**

- My first key line of enquiry was to find out how effectively leaders are developing the quality of teaching in mathematics so that all pupils make the progress they should.
- Although pupils' attainment in mathematics at the end of Year 2 has improved significantly over the past three years, it has consistently been in the bottom 20% of schools during this period. In Year 6, pupils' attainment fell to below average in 2018 and their progress over time was weak. This is because leadership and teaching in mathematics are not good enough. Leaders have not prioritised mathematics sufficiently and, although they have started to act in response to pupils' poor achievement, the pace of improvement is too slow.
- Teachers do not use assessment information effectively to plan mathematics work that matches pupils' abilities closely enough. As a result, middle- and high-attaining pupils spend too much time completing tasks they can already do. Teaching does not build progressively on pupils' prior learning. Sometimes learning does not move forward quickly enough, while at other times teachers move pupils on when they do not have a secure grasp of concepts. This limits pupils' progress.
- My second key line of enquiry was to explore how well the teaching of writing in key stage 1 enables boys and the most able pupils to make strong progress in the development of their writing skills.
- Over the past two years, boys' attainment in writing at the end of key stage 1 has been lower than that of girls. Leaders have given careful thought to how to capture boys' interests and motivate them to want to write. Staff plan topics that, across each academic year, appeal equally to the interests of boys and girls. A new approach to the teaching of writing that promotes discussion to stimulate pupils' imagination before they write has been particularly successful in improving the quality of boys' writing. As a result, work in pupils' books and the school's assessment information shows that there is currently no difference in boys' and girls' attainment and progress in writing in Years 1 and 2.
- Staff training and regular moderation of pupils' writing has improved teachers' understanding of the skills pupils need to write at greater depth. Teachers have higher expectations of the most able pupils and challenge them to use adventurous vocabulary and more complex punctuation than other pupils. Consequently, the most able pupils write with increasing stamina and precision. They make effective use of descriptive vocabulary and use their phonics skills to spell accurately. However, there is room to improve further the most able pupils' writing by teachers having even higher expectations of what these pupils can achieve.

- My third key line of enquiry was to investigate how well provision in the early years meets children's needs and interests to enable them to make strong progress from their starting points.
- Children join the early years with knowledge and skills that are typical for their age. Strong leadership has raised teachers' expectations of what children can achieve. As a result, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of their Reception Year has risen over the past four years and, in 2018, it was well above the national average. This means that children are well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- Adults in the early years make detailed and accurate assessments of children's learning. They use these assessments to carefully plan the curriculum so that it is responsive to children's needs and interests. Adults are quick to identify children who have low starting points and those who are falling behind. They provide tailored support for these children to help them to catch up quickly.
- Leaders have recently developed the indoor learning environment. As a result, both early years classrooms are well organised with lots of inviting areas and resources. There are many opportunities for children to develop their reading, writing and mathematics skills while they play. For example, in Nursery, children made use of visual prompts to help them to make buckets of sand that were full, half-full and empty. Other children sat writing letters to Father Christmas and Christmas cards to send to their friends.
- My fourth key line of enquiry was to look at how effectively teaching in the wider curriculum meets pupils' needs in mixed-age classes and enables them to make strong progress in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- Leaders have reviewed the curriculum to ensure that pupils learn subject-specific knowledge and skills in a range of subjects. As a result, the curriculum is broad, and pupils enjoy a range of rich learning experiences, for example conducting science experiments and role-playing important historical events. Staff use trips and visitors to further enrich pupils' learning. As a result, pupils are enthused about their work and can talk in detail about what they have learned.
- However, too often, teachers ask pupils to record their learning in ways that do not enable them to show what they know, understand and can do. The majority of written activities are low-level time-fillers and do not support pupils to make progress. They lack challenge for middle- and high-attaining pupils and do not deepen their understanding. Teachers do not plan work that meets the different ages and abilities of pupils in mixed-age classes closely enough. This limits pupils' progress in subjects such as science, history and geography.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of mathematics improves so that it is consistently effective, and pupils make the progress and attain the standards that they should
- pupils' spelling continues to improve, and teachers further develop their subject knowledge in writing so that the most able pupils are consistently challenged to

achieve the high standards of which they are capable

- teachers plan purposeful written activities that deepen pupils' understanding and enable them to show what they know, understand and can do in subjects such as science, history and geography.

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

Yours sincerely

Claire Jones  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with the headteacher, the associate assistant headteacher and the mathematics leader. I met with the chair of the governing body and four governors. I also met with a representative from the local authority. I observed pupils' learning in parts of eight lessons jointly with senior leaders. I looked at pupils' work in lessons and examined pupils' English, mathematics and topic books with senior leaders. I also looked at children's learning journals in the early years. I talked to pupils in lessons and met with a group of eight pupils from across the school. I examined a range of documentation, including information relating to current pupils' attainment and progress, the school development plan and leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I also scrutinised a range of safeguarding documents. I considered the 10 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire. I spoke to parents at the start of the school day and took into account the 23 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.