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Mrs Mitzi Nichol
Headteacher
Stillness Junior School
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Dear Mrs Nichol

Short inspection of Stillness Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 13 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 November 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

You and your leadership team recognise that, since the last inspection, pupils' outcomes have declined. The leadership team is relatively new and there is currently an interim arrangement in place. You are aware of the areas for improvement identified from the last inspection. However, standards in writing have not improved. You and your team have accurately identified the areas that need development in the school, and you have recently introduced improvement plans.

You have managed a period of staffing instability well. Staff mobility has been particularly high in recent years, but you have worked hard to minimise the destabilising effect that this has had on the school community. The staff are more stable, and those that I spoke to during the inspection said that they felt valued and enjoyed working at the school.

Pupils really like being at the school. They are proud of the school and enjoy the range of activities offered to them. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 were particularly looking forward to the Christmas pantomime that took place during the inspection.

You and your team work well with the neighbouring infant school, with which you share a site. Arrangements for breaktime and lunchtime are managed effectively as you take it in turns to use the outside space.

Pupils arrive in Year 3 with above-average attainment. Their knowledge, understanding and skill development in reading, writing and mathematics are strong. You are aware of their positive starting points and are keen to develop them further. The majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were positive about the school, although a significant minority said that they would welcome better communication with senior leaders.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that pupils are safe in school. When appointing new staff, you and other leaders make sure that they are suitable to work with children. Information is recorded efficiently and accurately and this is monitored and checked by leaders, including governors, regularly. You ensure that all staff receive regular safeguarding training and that they are familiar with the most recent safeguarding guidance. Staff know the warning signs that may suggest a child is at risk from harm. They know what to do if they are concerned and understand the importance of taking swift action.

Leaders retain information about the pupils who have been referred to external agencies, including those accessing early help. This information is currently recorded on paper. However, leaders are in the process of transferring to a centralised electronic recoding system. Leaders know the pupils who are most vulnerable and have clear support packages in place for them and their families. Indeed, one parent who responded to the parent questionnaire praised leaders for the way they had supported their family during a difficult time. The parents who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive about the school's arrangements for keeping pupils safe, with the vast majority saying that their child feels safe in school.

During the inspection, pupils said that they feel safe. They were particularly complimentary about the staff who they could go to for help, but also spoke of the strong relationships they had with their friends. Pupils said that their friends play a significant part in helping them to feel safe. Pupils are also taught how to keep themselves safe online.

Inspection findings

- For the first key line of enquiry, we agreed to look at what leaders have been doing to improve outcomes in writing. This is because writing was identified as an area for improvement from the previous inspection. Moreover, outcomes in writing at the end of key stage 2 were well below average in 2018.
- Leaders recognise that standards in writing have been low for a long time, and over the past two years standards have declined significantly. Leaders have recently introduced plans to improve progress in writing, but their response has been slow.
- A new approach to teaching writing has been introduced this year, requiring pupils to model their response using drawings and drama before they begin to write. This approach is at a very early stage and there is no evidence to suggest

that it is working effectively.

- Pupils join the school in Year 3 with strong knowledge and skills in writing. For example, they are able to explain rhetorical questioning, and they have a good grasp of conjunctions and fronted adverbials. However, this is not built on during their time at the school. Expectations and challenge do not rise with age. Indeed, during the inspection, pupils in all year groups were completing the same written task, with broadly similar expectations. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 were being challenged to use conjunctions and fronted adverbials, which some had mastered several years before.
- The teaching of writing typically focuses on pupils doing more of the same rather than teaching concepts and skills to a greater depth. Consequently, standards in writing are not improving quickly enough.
- For the second key line of enquiry, we agreed to look at what leaders are doing to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. This is because in 2018 disadvantaged pupils made much slower progress than their peers in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2.
- Leaders know that this group of pupils should be doing much better. They have evaluated how the additional pupil premium funding was spent last year and recognise that their plans were not as effective as they could have been.
- Leaders have refined plans for the current year. There is now a sharper focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning through higher-quality staff training. Leaders are also monitoring attendance more closely, and, as a result, disadvantaged pupils' attendance is improving.
- The new strategies have only recently been introduced and leaders have not yet evaluated the impact they are having on pupils' progress. However, work in books suggests that disadvantaged pupils are still making slower progress than their peers.
- Leaders do not routinely record whether the small number of pupils removed from lessons for disruptive behaviour are disadvantaged. As a result, they do not know whether they, or indeed any other group, are being disproportionately impacted by their own, or others', disruptive behaviour.
- For the third key line of enquiry, we agreed to look at the impact of leaders' work to improve outcomes for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This is because pupils with SEND did not achieve as well as their peers at the end of key stage 2 in 2018.
- Once again, leaders have accurately identified the need to improve outcomes for this group of pupils. They have recently introduced a range of strategies to ensure that pupils with SEND make better progress. Leaders' plans include additional training for teaching staff and higher-level teaching assistants. Leaders are also keen to ensure that staff are aware of pupils' needs, and that they use this information to help them plan.
- This plan was only introduced in September 2018, and leaders acknowledge that it is too early to know whether it has been successful.
- During the inspection, there were some examples of good practice, particularly in

Years 3 and 4. In some lessons, pupils with SEND were encouraged to use writing slopes and were given sentence starters to support them in their writing. These adjustments helped pupils to make faster progress. Teaching assistants were also deployed effectively to support learning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- standards in writing improve rapidly across subjects by ensuring that pupils are given opportunities to develop and deepen their writing skills as they progress through the school
- the pupil premium funding is spent effectively to improve the quality of teaching, and improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils
- the plans recently established to support pupils with SEND are fully embedded and lead to stronger progress over time
- the systems for recording and storing pupils' information are improved so that information is easily accessible and used effectively by leaders and staff.

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

Yours sincerely

Niall Gallagher
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and a range of staff, including senior and middle leaders. I also met governors and reviewed 101 parent questionnaires. There were no responses to the staff and pupils' questionnaires. I met with a group of pupils to talk about their views of the school and made visits to classrooms jointly with senior leaders. I spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at the work in their books. I evaluated a range of school documentation, including safeguarding records and leaders' development plans.