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Miss Helen Nicholson
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Dear Helen Nicholson

Short inspection of Pepper Hill School

Following my visit to the school on 7 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 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.

As headteacher, you have galvanised the school staff and local community, to share your ambition to achieve the very best for the pupils in the school. Working closely with other school leaders, you have effectively developed a leadership structure that focuses on teamwork and shared accountability.

You are rightly proud that Pepper Hill School is a nurturing and welcoming school in which pupils flourish and learn well together. Relationships between staff and children are excellent. The comment from one parent that staff 'go above and beyond to care for the children' was representative of the views expressed by many others. All members of the school community are committed to the school's motto of 'We climb together to succeed.' Pupils are very proud of their school and describe it as 'fantastic', 'amazing' and 'fabulous'. However, you recognise that the attendance of pupils is an area which could be even better, and you are working closely with families to address this.

Pupils feel valued and feel that every member of staff will listen to them. One pupil said, 'If you have a problem at school you tell the teacher and they always sort out our problems.'

At the time of the last inspection inspectors highlighted good teaching, a broad and balanced curriculum and strong governance. These aspects remain strong. Inspectors asked you to ensure that all staff were given the appropriate training to

support those pupils at the early stages of reading. All staff have received appropriate and useful training and are very skilled in the teaching of reading. Staff morale is high and there is a strong sense of shared purpose that pervades the school. Staff feel well supported by leaders and are clear about what the school is trying to achieve. One member of staff described the school as 'a fantastic supportive environment in which to work'.

Senior leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas that could be improved further. Pupils make good progress overall in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers set high expectations for learning and behaviour and pupils live up to these in lessons and around the school.

Pupils are making strong progress generally. However, disadvantaged pupils attain less well than their peers and their progress is more variable. For example, disadvantaged pupils attained the expected standard in writing but their attainment in reading and mathematics is below that of their peers. You have identified this as a priority in your development plans. However, your current plans do not enable leaders and governors to evaluate the impact of their actions with sufficient rigour.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of a high quality. Safeguarding is at the heart of the school's caring and supportive environment. Staff and governors regularly undertake high-quality training.

All the parents who completed the online questionnaire, stated that their child feels safe. Pupils whom I spoke to agreed that they feel safe in school. One parent said, 'The staff as a whole are a fantastic team who know the children and family well and make us all feel welcome.' You know your pupils well and they value the strong sense of community and care that pervades this school.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on the following areas: the effectiveness of safeguarding; how you have improved the teaching of writing especially for the most able boys and disadvantaged pupils; the progress of pupils in reading and phonics; and the progress that children make in the early years from their starting points.
- My first line of enquiry focused on the progress of most able pupils in writing at key stage 1. At the time of the last inspection this was identified as an area for improvement and you have worked successfully to ensure that the most able pupils make good progress. Teachers share your high expectations that these pupils will achieve well. Work in pupils' books shows that teachers set challenging work. Pupils are confident learners, who know what they are aiming for. Due to your concerted efforts to raise standards, the most able pupils are now making better progress than was previously the case.
- We focused on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils at key stage 1 because the school's performance information in the past indicates that this group has not

attained as well in writing compared to pupils nationally. You reorganised the teaching of writing and established interventions that improve pupils' learning. For example, staff have received carefully targeted training focusing on increasing pupils' independence and self-esteem. In addition to this, you have employed additional teaching assistants to work specifically with disadvantaged pupils. As a result, outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are improving. However, you rightly recognise that extra funding for disadvantaged pupils has not yet enabled them to catch up with their peers in school or nationally.

- The teaching of phonics is good. Senior leaders have a clear strategy to ensure that pupils learn phonics effectively. You provide staff with high-quality training to ensure that all pupils benefit from good phonics teaching. Pupils are grouped by attainment and this helps support their individual needs. Leaders make sure that pupils who need it receive support to help reinforce their understanding. This approach, coupled with teachers' high expectations, means that pupils, particularly the most able pupils, are now making better progress in their reading than in the past.
- You are working carefully to further improve the attendance of pupils, including meeting with parents when their child's attendance has been poor. Records show that, because of your actions, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has fallen. Nevertheless, attendance overall remains slightly below the national average. You and your team are continuing to work sensitively with families so that pupils can attend school more regularly and maximise their time at school.
- Children make good progress and achieve well in the early years. Staff carry out baseline assessments to get a full and detailed profile of the children's skills and abilities when they start school. The school's own performance information shows that a large proportion of current children enter Reception with skills and knowledge that are well below those typical for their age. Children's development is tracked meticulously. This enables staff to extend children's learning skilfully.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they focus on improving the progress of disadvantaged pupils, so a higher proportion attain the expected standard at the end of key stage 1
- they refine their development plans to enable leaders and governors to clearly evaluate the impact of their work
- their continued work leads to further overall improvements in pupils' attendance.

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

Yours sincerely

David Harris

Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your deputy headteacher and several members of staff. We talked about the improvements which have been made since the last inspection. Together, we undertook observations of learning in lessons. I examined pupils' work, focusing on writing. I held a meeting with two governors, including the chair of governors. Before the inspection, I examined a variety of documents, including the school's website, published performance information and a summary of your school's self-evaluation document. I took account of 13 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including six written comments. I also considered 19 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. A range of documentation was evaluated, including documents relating to safeguarding and governance.