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Mrs Sally Fenby
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Fenby

Short inspection of Old Hill Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 January 2019, 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 2015.

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.

You know the school well and lead it with a clear sense of purpose. Leaders and teachers have high expectations of themselves and their pupils. Leaders are driven to find new ways to improve teaching. They base their strategies on findings from research and enquiry, some of which is conducted within the school. Together you have acted to ensure that there is a high degree of consistency in the approach to teaching and learning across the school. This has involved introducing progressive and high-quality professional development for staff. It is evident that teaching is strong across the school. Leaders work to cascade best practice to raise the quality of teaching in every class. This continues to be a priority for the school to further increase the quality of teaching and learning. As a consequence of the whole-school strategies to drive improvements, the quality of the work produced by pupils is impressive and, in terms of the wider curriculum, is beyond what would normally be expected at their age.

The school's distinctive ethos, based on the values of 'appreciation, perseverance, respect, responsibility, tolerance and trust', enables you to deliver the motto 'aiming higher every day'. Pupils are happy and express true pride in their school. Their behaviour is consistently exemplary in lessons and around the school. Their highly

positive attitudes make a strong contribution to their very good learning. Older pupils are appreciative of the opportunities they are given to take responsibility within the school, particularly when it involves ensuring the well-being of their younger peers. Pupils are exceptionally welcoming and courteous to visitors. The pupils who spoke to me were confident, articulate and a credit to the school.

Governors make a significant contribution to the strong leadership of the school. They are highly skilled and well informed about all aspects of school life. As a result, the challenge and support they provide for school leaders is highly effective.

In the last inspection, you were asked to place more emphasis on subjects beyond English and mathematics and to ensure that pupils were given opportunities to deepen their understanding. The evidence in pupils' workbooks shows that pupils are learning across a wide range of subjects and are being given challenging tasks that require deep knowledge and understanding. You are still in the process of developing additional curriculum themes, so this will continue to be a focus for the school.

You were also asked to provide more training for teaching assistants so that all of them could be fully effective in helping pupils learn. The school's monitoring evidence and the evidence I observed during the inspection indicate that teaching assistants are successfully deployed in lessons. They understand their role in lessons and, through questioning and support, make a notable difference to pupils' learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and the school site is safe and secure for your pupils. Staff are thorough in checking visitors' identity on entry and ensuring that they have a clear understanding of safeguarding procedures.

Pupils say they feel very safe and well cared for in school. They feel confident that adults will help them, if needed. They have a clear understanding of how to stay safe, both in the real world and when online. Staff and governors receive a broad range of information and training with regard to safeguarding. This ensures that support provided to pupils is timely and appropriate.

Attendance of pupils is closely monitored by you and the school's parent support adviser. She contributes in a significant way to ensure positive relationships between home and school and the well-being of all pupils. Pupil absence is followed up immediately, using a range of strategies, including visiting families at home. This focus is resulting in a steady reduction in pupil absence.

Inspection findings

- A focus of the inspection was to consider the work of leaders to ensure that pupils achieve well in reading. This was because leaders recognise that the acquisition of language and reading are a gateway to learning across the

curriculum. This aspect of learning has been a high-profile focus for the school. Teachers ensure that pupils develop a deep level of word awareness. For example, pupils can explain how prefixes and suffixes change the meaning of root words. Leaders have ensured that the development of word awareness is strategically taught across the school, so that current learning builds on previous learning in a systematic way. Leaders place emphasis on pupils developing reading fluency, so that strong reading skills enable pupils to access learning across the curriculum.

- Leaders have deployed staff purposefully to enable pupils in key stage 1 to make rapid progress in phonics. This has been a large part of the drive to ensure that pupils acquire language skills as quickly as possible on entry to the school. Over the past few years, pupils' achievement in the Year 1 phonics screening check has been consistently in line with or above expected standards.
- Teachers use interesting, high-quality texts as a focal point for teaching across the curriculum. In this way, pupils are exposed to a range of fiction and non-fiction texts and develop a wide range of subject-specific vocabulary. Teachers capitalise on opportunities to reinforce word awareness. For example, in one class, the word 'preserve' had been introduced in an English lesson where pupils were studying words beginning with 'pre', and later that day it occurred in a text about the Egyptians' practice of mummification.
- In mathematics, leaders have implemented a very clearly structured sequence for teaching concepts and skills. Year group expectations have been identified, which have enabled teachers to know precisely the skills they need to teach. Pupils are introduced to concepts using practical equipment, before being introduced to pictorial representations and then abstract methods. In this way, pupils acquire a deep understanding of mathematical concepts, which they can apply to solve problems and investigate the way numbers work.
- Having researched the most effective methods of learning for pupils, leaders have established a whole-school approach to teaching that ensures pupils learn efficiently and retain knowledge. Over time, the approach helps pupils to develop a higher level of memory retrieval. Its impact is seen most notably in pupils' work in the wider curriculum where, particularly in key stage 2, they are learning curriculum content that is well above national expectations for their chronological age. For example, in Year 4, pupils have studied Russia's energy. They can explain how Russia produces energy. They can describe the events of Chernobyl and they can discuss the advantages and disadvantages of nuclear power.
- The final aspect the inspection focused on was the breadth of the curriculum, which was an area for development in the last inspection. Leaders have addressed this. Pupils are being given lots of opportunities to experience a diverse and challenging curriculum. Evidence in pupils' workbooks demonstrates that subject-specific skills are taught and then pupils are given opportunities to further develop these skills in the context of their independent work. The sketch books I saw reflected this approach very evidently. Pupils were taught artistic skills, such as how to create line, tone or colour mixing, and then used the work of artists such as Van Gogh or Kandinsky to inspire their own artwork. However, leaders agree that the development of additional curriculum themes continues to

be an area for further development within the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching across the school continues to be strengthened by the provision of high-quality professional development in order to extend the best practice already available in the school
- the curriculum continues to be developed through the creation of stimulating curriculum themes.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Davies
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, other members of staff and members of the governing body. I also spoke on the telephone to the local authority school improvement adviser. Together, you and I planned the key lines of enquiry for the inspection. We jointly visited classes in the school to observe pupils' learning, speak with pupils and look in their books. I looked at an extensive range of current pupils' books from each year group. I also spoke with pupils at breaktime and during the day. I spoke with parents and carers at the start of the school day. I took into account the 13 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including the 12 free-text responses received during the inspection. I also took account of the 50 responses to the pupil survey and the 31 responses to the staff survey. I looked at a range of documentation, including information about safeguarding and attendance. I scrutinised and discussed the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement.