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Dear Miss Day

Short inspection of Hamstead Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 16 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 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.

Hamstead Infant School is a welcoming and friendly place where all pupils feel safe and happy. As headteacher, you have established a caring and nurturing environment. Together with governors and the senior leadership team, you have ensured that the vision of 'Dream, believe, achieve' has been maintained despite recent challenges. Staff bring the vision to life through regular celebration assemblies where all pupils' achievements and successes are recognised.

The values of tolerance, respect and individual liberty are evident across the school. Pupils learn about these fundamental British values through lessons and assemblies. For example, pupils created a display of poppies to commemorate Remembrance Day in November. The school's diverse population is recognised and celebrated. A display of the different faiths observed by pupils and their families demonstrates the school's commitment to equality and respect.

Children behave very well in lessons and around the school. Even the youngest children are responsible and sensible. Older pupils act as playground buddies or school council representatives. At breaks and lunchtimes, pupils play well together. Although adults are supervising, they rarely need to intervene because of poor behaviour.

All pupils are engaged in their learning throughout the school. From their first days in Nursery, children are well supported by adults to take part in purposeful play and learning activities. The lively environment in the Nursery supports learning well. However, the outdoor area is less appealing. Some of the equipment is tired and worn. You plan to refurbish this area when funding is available.

Parents say staff are always available to discuss their concerns. They value the workshops and resources that help them to support their children's learning at home. The curriculum information on the school's website is detailed, and newsletters tell parents about the curriculum focus for the next half term. The website also includes useful strategies for parents to help children with early phonics skills. In this way, the school builds very effective partnerships with parents. One parent's comment summarised the views of many: 'Every child matters to all teachers at the school and they should be proud of their achievements.' The school has recently received a 'Well-being Award' from Sandwell local authority in recognition of this commitment to caring for all pupils.

Since the last inspection, pupils' achievements have been variable. A significant number of pupils join the school midway through the year, some of whom speak little English or have not attended school before. Despite this, you ensure that all children are welcome and that teachers have high expectations of what they can achieve. Over the last three years, the proportion of pupils achieving a good level of development (GLD) by the end of Reception has improved year on year to be broadly in line with the national average for those children who joined the school in Nursery or at the start of Reception. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the phonics screening check by the end of Year 1 has been below the national average for the last two years. At the end of key stage 1 in 2018, the proportion of pupils achieving the standard expected for their age in reading and mathematics was below the national averages but above the national average in writing. However, the proportions of pupils achieving at the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics were above the national averages in 2018. Disadvantaged pupils in Year 2 last year achieved as well as other pupils.

At the last inspection, you were asked to increase the proportion of pupils achieving the higher standard in mathematics by ensuring that all teachers have the highest expectations of what the most able mathematicians can achieve. You were asked particularly to ensure pupils' developed their calculation and problem-solving skills throughout their time in school.

You were also asked to ensure that adults who support teachers in the classroom share and learn from the outstanding practice that existed at the time of the last inspection within the school.

It is clear that you have addressed these areas for improvement effectively. In mathematics in 2018, a much higher proportion of pupils achieved a higher than expected standard for their age at the end of key stage 1.

In mathematics lessons, teachers give clear explanations and, in the main, set tasks

that are well matched to pupils' needs. Teachers' questions promote discussion and require pupils to justify their answers when solving problems. Pupils use a variety of resources to support their learning, which particularly helps to embed their calculation skills. Teachers expect pupils to use sophisticated mathematical language. For example, when matching names to shapes, pupils described the features of octagons, hexagons and cuboids. However, older pupils are not challenged sufficiently in all areas of mathematics.

You have reviewed the support provided by adults other than teachers and provided training to develop their skills. Adults who support pupils in lessons check their understanding and prompt pupils effectively with additional questions when necessary. This helps to ensure pupils remain focused on their learning and ensures pupils make good progress. Teachers work closely with the other adults in their classrooms to make sure they understand what the pupils are learning and how they can support them. As a result, pupils are well supported to make strong progress, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You serve on the local education safeguarding panel, which helps you to keep up to date with the latest advice and guidance. You pass on learning from serious case reviews to staff through regular briefings. Staff know how to spot signs of abuse or neglect, and they know how to report any concerns. Staff and governors are aware of their responsibility to protect pupils from radicalisation or extremism under the 'Prevent' duty. They know how to spot the signs and how to make referrals, should they need to. Children feel safe and parents are confident that children are safe in school. Children say that bullying doesn't happen, because they are friends with everyone.

Inspection findings

- As part of this inspection, I looked at three specific focuses identified through my pre-inspection analysis: outcomes for different groups of pupils; leadership and management; and attendance.
- In recent years, disadvantaged pupils, boys, pupils with SEND and those for whom English is an additional language have not achieved as well as others. You explained that there have been some significant challenges in terms of funding and other changes over the last two academic years which had an impact on pupils' outcomes. However, you have been determined to ensure that high standards are restored. In 2018, outcomes for these groups of pupils improved to be more closely in line with national averages.
- Disadvantaged pupils now make good progress. When they start in Reception, many children have language and communication skills below the level typical for their age. By the end of the Reception class, a higher proportion of children, including disadvantaged children, reach the level expected for their age.

- At the end of key stage 1 in 2018, an increased proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieved the higher standard in mathematics and reading. Those pupils who speak English as an additional language and who had been in the school since the beginning of Reception, did very well last year, with many of them achieving at a higher standard than that expected for their age.
- Current assessment information and work in pupils' books show that disadvantaged pupils, boys and those for whom English is an additional language are making strong progress in writing. This is because they have plenty of opportunities to write and they are introduced very early on to mark making and letter formation. Teachers make learning fun. For example, in Nursery, pupils excitedly acted as detectives, hunting for letters hidden around the room and writing them down in their notebooks. This was an excellent way to engage children, particularly boys, in writing.
- Current assessment information shows that pupils with SEND are making good progress. A new tracking system enables teachers to measure the small steps of pupils' progress in a range of indicators more precisely. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), although relatively new in post, has made a good start in ensuring that the needs of all pupils are identified and addressed effectively. She works closely with the local authority inclusion support team. Information for parents about their children's progress is improving.
- The second focus for this inspection was leadership and management. In the light of variable outcomes and previous low attendance, I wanted to know whether the good standard of leadership and management had been maintained. You have identified potential future leaders on your staff and supported them to take on additional responsibilities. With your support and that of the deputy headteacher, they are growing in their roles. You have ensured that they access additional support and appropriate formal training to progress further. You agreed that leaders need to develop their coaching skills in order to have more impact on improving the quality of teaching.
- The third focus for this inspection was attendance. This was because, in the past, pupils' attendance had dipped to well below the national average. A very high number of pupils had persistently poor attendance, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. You recognised that, despite some slight improvements over the last academic year, further improvements needed to be made quickly and you put in place a range of interventions to address this.
- With the support of governors, you now employ an attendance officer who tracks and monitors pupils' attendance rigorously. She meets with parents and, if necessary, visits pupils' homes to make sure that, if there is not a legitimate reason for absence such as illness, children come to school. Alongside this, fines have been issued to parents whose children do not come to school regularly enough.
- Pupils now know how important it is for them to come to school every day. The attendance teddy bear visits the class with the highest attendance every week. Children love to welcome teddy to their classrooms, so they compete to make sure their class has the highest attendance. You have the same expectations for high attendance in the Nursery, so that good habits are established from the

start of a child's time at the school.

- As a result of these initiatives, attendance improved rapidly throughout the autumn term in 2018 to be in line with the national average. Punctuality has also improved, which means that fewer pupils miss vital learning time at the start of the school day. You are rightly proud of these dramatic improvements, which are helping to improve outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the early years outdoor area is refreshed so that it is a vibrant, engaging space which better supports children's learning
- leaders new to their roles are supported to develop their coaching skills so that they can make a greater impact on improving teaching further
- teachers provide more challenge for older pupils in mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Jane Spilsbury
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Before the inspection, I looked at the most recently published assessment information for the school. I also reviewed the information on the school's website and read the last Ofsted inspection report.

During the inspection, I visited lessons with you and we discussed our findings. I met with you and other leaders to discuss aspects of your work, including your evaluation of the school's current performance, safeguarding, the impact of pupil premium funding, the curriculum and the quality of teaching and learning.

I met with leaders to discuss attendance and support for pupils with SEND. I met with representatives of the governing body and spoke to the local authority school improvement adviser who supports the school.

I spoke to parents at the start of the school day and considered 39 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online parent questionnaire. I took into account 17 responses to the staff survey. There were no responses to the pupil survey.

I spoke to pupils about how they learn to keep themselves safe and about

behaviour in the school. I spoke to staff about their understanding of safeguarding and their responsibility to keep children safe.