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Miss Natalie Hackett
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Dear Miss Hackett

Short inspection of Fernvale Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You and your senior leaders have provided effective leadership during a period of considerable change. Since the previous inspection, you have joined the Oadby, Wigston and Leicestershire Academy Trust, welcomed five new teachers, retained your first cohort of Year 6 pupils and, this year, established a second Reception class. The newly built teaching area for these pupils is vibrant and well resourced, both indoors and outside.

During this time of change, you have maintained your focus on ensuring that pupils benefit from an interesting and varied curriculum, while also ensuring that they develop a strong set of core values. You know the school well and are ambitious for all pupils to thrive and achieve their potential. Staff are proud to be part of an effective team and enjoy working at the school.

Parents and carers are positive about the school. Most parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as those I spoke with, commended you and your staff for your care and support. One parent commented positively on your focus on 'character development, emotional well-being and friendships'. The useful information you provide on your website and regular workshops and newsletters are helping parents to gain a better understanding of how they can help their child at home. You have begun to increase the extra-curricular opportunities available to pupils in response to parent requests.

Pupils are welcoming and polite to each other and visitors. Lessons are typically focused and calm, with a positive working atmosphere. Pupils cooperate and support each other well. As a result of prominent, high-quality displays around the school and work completed in class, pupils are fully aware of the importance of fundamental British values. Difference is valued and respected. One pupil commented, 'We don't judge people by what they believe or look like.'

Senior leaders have comprehensive procedures for school improvement planning. Members of the local governing body visit often and know the school well. They are fully involved in the rigorous peer review process led by the chief executive officer of the trust. You have supported your middle leaders to develop the leadership skills needed to carry out their roles effectively. They work with you to keep a close eye on the quality of teaching. In addition, you meet class teachers regularly to discuss pupils' progress. As a result of these actions, leaders know exactly what is working well and what could be better.

You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. At that time, leaders were asked to improve teaching by making sure that the pace of learning does not slow during lessons. When we visited classrooms during the inspection, we saw pupils fully engaged and absorbed in their learning. For example, in a mathematics lesson, pupils were accurately comparing and ordering fractions. Teachers used questioning well to prompt pupils to think more deeply about their responses. Your staff have regular opportunities to visit other schools within the trust and to share good teaching practice. This collaboration has afforded challenge and support for staff at all levels. Professional development links closely to school improvement priorities and to teacher appraisal.

You were also asked to make sure that older pupils are clear about their long-term goals so that they can take a higher level of personal responsibility for their progress towards them. Pupils that I spoke with say that they value the feedback and targets that teachers share with them. They understand what they need to improve and how they can achieve this. As a result, they are making increasingly good progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders, including the local governing body, have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a strong and effective culture of safeguarding in the school. Your staff receive regular training and are aware of their responsibilities. Staff make prompt referrals of any concerns, using the school's reporting system. Records are clear and well maintained. As the designated safeguarding lead, you follow up referrals to external agencies appropriately. You work in close partnership with external agencies to provide support for families and pupils, often going the 'extra mile' to ensure that pupils access the services they need. Leaders ensure that the required checks are completed to ensure that staff and volunteers are suitable to work in the school.

Pupils who spoke with me say they feel safe and cared for. A few parents expressed some concerns about bullying in the online questionnaire, Parent View. The pupils who I met with have a clear understanding of what bullying is. They say that bullying rarely happens

and they are confident that an adult will deal with any concerns swiftly and fully. On the day of the inspection, there was a visitor in school to lead an assembly on dealing with bullying and you have gained a national award for your work in this area.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe when using the internet or mobile devices. They speak articulately about the importance of not sharing their personal information online or with strangers. They also learn about fire, road and water safety. Older pupils enthusiastically discussed their visit to the Warning Zone, where they learned how to deal with a range of hazards and dangers. Pupils say they feel safe in school and can cite many examples of how leaders and other staff ensure this. A very large majority of parents who responded to the online questionnaire, and the parents I spoke with on the playground before school, say their children are happy and safe at the school. You and your staff know pupils and their families very well and this is a strength of the school.

Inspection findings

- The proportion of children in the early years who attain a good level of development fell in 2018 from above the national average to in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in key stage 1 was also broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics. In both key stages, boys achieved standards below those of girls, particularly in reading and writing. Leaders have reviewed how they plan the curriculum to ensure that boys make more rapid progress in these areas. Staff plan a range of well-thought-out activities which have a clear focus on developing early literacy skills. Reading books have been purchased and there is an incentive scheme to reward regular reading at home.
- In Reception, we saw boys and girls fully absorbed in their learning, writing shopping lists and storyboards and reading in groups. You have funded additional specialist support to improve children's speech and language skills. Several parents spoke to me about the positive impact of this provision. Pupils in key stage 1 benefit from very effective phonics teaching and they are given many opportunities to apply their reading and writing skills. Pupils take pride in their cursive handwriting and the standard of presentation is consistently good. Evidence seen during the inspection indicates that boys will achieve standards at least in line with the national average this year. You recognise that there is a need for greater challenge in lessons to ensure that more boys reach the higher standards in reading and writing.
- Some pupils in Year 3 are receiving additional support to catch up in their reading and writing. Evidence seen during the inspection showed all pupils writing at length as they produced a fantasy story using the features they had learned. You recognise that there is more work to be done to develop the accuracy of pupils' spelling.
- In 2018, pupils in key stage 2 took the national curriculum tests for the first time. Pupils' attainment and progress in mathematics were below the national averages. As a result, leaders have revised the school's approach to teaching mathematics. There is now a sharper focus on ensuring that all pupils have the required mathematical fluency and speed of response. Additional problem-solving activities are being provided, and staff encourage pupils to discuss their answers in depth. Teachers and teaching assistants question pupils skilfully to help them reflect on their work and move their learning forward. Pupils are able to justify their mathematical reasoning with increasing

confidence. The progress of all pupils is reviewed closely, and those who are at risk of falling behind are given helpful support to catch up. As a result, pupils are making stronger progress.

- In 2018, boys' progress in reading and writing at the end of key stage 2 was below average. Not enough of the middle- and higher-ability pupils reached the higher standard. Your analysis of the reading tests showed that some pupils did not achieve as well as you expected because they did not answer questions in sufficient depth. Teachers now give pupils regular opportunities to answer more complex reading questions and they challenge them to extend their thinking. As a result, more pupils, especially boys, are on track to achieve the higher standard.
- When we looked at pupils' workbooks together, we saw many examples of high-quality writing. Staff demonstrate strong subject knowledge as they build pupils' skills by progressively introducing features of effective writing during a series of lessons. Pupils are taught how to review and edit to improve the quality of their writing. Boys that I spoke with commented on how much they enjoy writing. Accordingly, most pupils are now achieving the expected standard. However, as we discussed during the inspection, not enough middle- and higher-ability boys are attaining the higher standard in writing because they do not routinely use the more complex sentence structures and punctuation that they have been taught.
- During the inspection, I focused closely on the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. The attendance of this group of pupils is well below the national average. Persistent absence for these pupils is also very high. You have recognised this and closely monitor pupils who have low rates of attendance. Along with other staff, you work closely with parents and their children to offer support that is tailored to individual circumstances. Pupils are invited to before-school and after-school clubs and have additional support at the start of the school day. Some parents have responded positively to your approach and there are signs of improvement. You recognise that too many disadvantaged pupils are still persistently absent from school and that there is more to do in this area.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers consistently challenge boys to extend their use of more complex sentence structures and punctuation in their writing so that more reach the higher standard
- rates of attendance of disadvantaged pupils rise so that they are at least in line with the national average.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of

children's services for Leicestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Sanchez-Thompson
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I visited six classes with you to observe teaching, learning and assessment. We also checked the progress of pupils in the Reception classes and in Years 2, 3, 5 and 6 in their workbooks. We discussed the school's effectiveness and the actions taken to ensure the school's continued improvement.

I met with leaders with responsibility for English, mathematics and special educational needs and/or disabilities. I spoke with two members of the local governing body and the chief executive officer of the trust. I met with two groups of pupils from Years 2 to 6 and talked informally with other pupils in lessons and during playtime. I met with parents on the playground at the beginning of the school day.

I looked at a range of documents, including your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and the school's improvement plan. I also scrutinised the school's safeguarding systems, records and associated documents. I checked assessment information on how well pupils are achieving. I considered 78 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, 69 free-text comments from parents and one comment submitted directly to Ofsted. I also considered 17 responses to the online staff questionnaire.