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Mrs Catherine Nisbet
Headteacher
Mrs Bland's Infant School
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Dear Mrs Nisbet

Short inspection of Mrs Bland's Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 13 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 the school was judged to be good in May 2015.

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 deputy headteacher are highly effective. You lead the school with a high degree of compassion and dedication, which is reflected in the caring and inclusive ethos throughout the school. Parents, carers, staff and governors are united in their praise for the commitment you show to the school and the community it serves. One parent summed up the views of many by saying: 'Leaders' commitment to children shows in everything they do.'

Since the previous inspection, the quality of education has strengthened further. Staff are positive about the school and feel valued in their work. They appreciate the regular professional development meetings that allow them to keep up to date with the latest curriculum requirements and teaching strategies. Parents are full of praise for the teachers in the school. As one said: 'The teachers have gone out of their way to ensure my child is happy, safe and secure.' Another said: 'Teachers put a great deal of thought into making topics interesting and fun.' Parents particularly praised the school's commitment to using the outdoor spaces for learning.

You, other leaders and governors have an accurate understanding of the strengths and relative weaknesses of the school. Governors know the school very well and hold leaders to account for their work strongly. Leaders make thoughtful improvements to provision in the school, ensuring that they research best practice and review what works best for the pupils in their school. Over time, this has helped to improve the school.

Over time, you have raised the attainment of pupils at all stages of their education. You have improved the way that staff use assessment so that their planning is more closely focused on pupils' different starting points. As a result, teaching meets pupils' different needs more securely. From average, and increasingly below-average starting points, pupils make strong progress across the curriculum, and increase in self-confidence and resilience. By the time they leave key stage 1, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics regularly exceeds the national average. However, you recognise that disadvantaged pupils need to make more rapid progress from their starting points.

Pupils are very well behaved and friendly. At playtimes, they play together enthusiastically, including each other in their active and creative games. Pupils display a sense of pride in their school and are welcoming to adults who visit. They like the praise they receive for attending regularly and working hard. They enjoy participating in clubs such as choir, football and gardening.

In classrooms, pupils work calmly and with purpose. Pupils trust teachers and other adults to help them learn. Pupils, in particular the most able, are productive when writing and typically thoughtful about their presentation. Adults make sure that pupils gain subject-specific knowledge and skills across a broad and balanced curriculum. In science, pupils are inspired by such activities as carrying out experiments to find out the solubility of liquids, or in writing about the astronaut Tim Peake's space mission. Pupils appreciate the extra-curricular opportunities for them to broaden their understanding of different subjects. For example, pupils spoke enthusiastically about a recent visit to Oxford Castle, describing knowledgeably who built it and what castles were for. Leaders' work to further refine and review the quality of the curriculum is well thought through.

At the last inspection, the early years was judged to be outstanding, and it continues to be so. You have broadened the age range in the nursery so that it now includes provision for two-year-olds. Children in the nursery settle quickly because of the care and dedication of the skilled adults in the provision. Their focus on building children's speech and language skills is well judged, as you have noticed that this is helping to improve the progress of children, particularly disadvantaged children. Throughout the early years, setting adults plan learning for children so that they gain in self-confidence and enjoy developing their skills across the full range of the curriculum. The provision is very well resourced, with a welcoming, inclusive ethos that parents appreciate and allows children to thrive. Above-average proportions of children reach a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year. They are very well prepared for Year 1.

Safeguarding is effective.

Arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff are well trained and understand their safeguarding responsibilities well. They know the signs that may indicate neglect or abuse. They are vigilant in reporting any concerns they may have.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They are confident that an adult will listen and help if they have any worries. The curriculum includes opportunities for pupils to learn about staying safe. For example, they learn about road safety, e-safety and personal safety. Pupils happily explained to me the difference between a fire drill and a lockdown procedure and knew what to do in both situations.

Leaders and governors make sure that all safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose and effective. The designated safeguarding lead and deputies are highly knowledgeable and passionate about keeping children safe. Leaders are persistent when liaising with outside agencies to make sure that children get the right level of support and in a timely manner. Recruitment checks on the suitability of staff working in the school are thorough and recorded accurately on the single central record.

Inspection findings

- Last year, you noticed a slight dip in standards in phonics to just below the national average. You have responded to this quickly by improving the quality of adults' planning to ensure that all pupils get the best possible provision. Teachers and other adults are well trained and effective in teaching phonics. They plan imaginative activities which are well matched to pupils' starting points. Pupils are attentive and participate willingly in phonics sessions. Consequently, standards are rising, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. A higher proportion of pupils are on track to achieve the standard of the phonics check than last year.
- You and your team provide effective support for pupils eligible for pupil premium funding. You have made sure that you know extremely well the different barriers to learning faced by the various groups of disadvantaged pupils in your school. You make good use of a whole host of appropriate strategies aimed at removing these barriers. For example, you prioritise improving children's speech and language skills from when they join in the early years, including in the two-year-old setting. You also focus on increasing pupils' resilience, confidence and attendance, as you recognise that this can be the key to success for some disadvantaged pupils. Disadvantaged pupils' attainment has risen in the last three years, particularly in reading and writing. However, you recognise that there is more to be achieved to diminish the difference in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and others nationally.
- At the last inspection, Ofsted asked you to develop the role of middle leaders so that they became fully involved in leading their subjects. Over time, subject leaders have started to play more of a part in leading their subjects, and this year you have revamped the school's approach completely. Consequently, most subject leaders are new to their roles. They are passionate about the areas of the curriculum that they have responsibility for and are enthusiastic about their work. They are making great strides in mapping out a curriculum which makes sure that pupils learn subject-specific knowledge, skills and vocabulary in a balanced way. Leaders check their colleagues' planning and offer advice on how best to teach different topics. Discussions with pupils and scrutiny of their books revealed that the impact of this work is already evident: pupils write knowledgeably about topics they have studied and talk confidently about their

learning in subjects such as science and history. Further aims, for example to improve assessment of the curriculum, increase leaders' role in monitoring teaching and to improve levels of challenge for the most able pupils in these subjects is well under way.

- Since the last inspection, you have increased pupils' attendance so that it is now broadly average. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is also much reduced, including for disadvantaged pupils. You have achieved this due to the very effective work you have undertaken in partnership with the educational welfare service to raise awareness of the importance of coming to school regularly. You have worked closely with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, creating an inclusive curriculum which encourages children to want to come to school regularly. You monitor pupils' attendance sharply, spotting any patterns and chasing up any emerging issues quickly. You have strong procedures in place to check that children who are not in school are safe.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- middle leaders continue to review and monitor the quality of the curriculum
- outcomes for disadvantaged pupils continue to improve so that they make rapid progress from their starting points.

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

Yours sincerely

Catherine Old
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I observed learning throughout the school with senior leaders. I met with you and your deputy headteacher throughout the inspection to discuss your self-evaluation. I met with some subject leaders to discuss the curriculum and to review pupils' work. I met with governors and with a representative of the local authority. I spoke with pupils during lessons and at playtime and met with a group of pupils from key stage 1. I spoke to some parents at the start of the school day and took account of the 42 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, including 28 free-text responses. I considered the 21 survey responses submitted by staff. I scrutinised a range of school documentation including safeguarding and child protection records, attendance information and the school's improvement planning.