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Miss Lesley Cassidy
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Cassidy

Short inspection of Plains Farm Academy

Following my visit to the school on 8 May 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. You lead the school with determination and high expectations that every pupil can achieve well. You are supported by an able leadership team and a competent governing body. You liaise effectively with the chief executive headteacher and the lead headteacher of Inspire Multi-Academy Trust, appreciating the strong, collaborative partnership.

You are held in high regard by staff, who say they are proud to work at the school. One staff member said that staff feel valued members of the school team who work together closely and support each other well. Teachers and teaching assistants have benefited from the professional development and training that they access through the multi-academy trust. This has helped further improve the quality of teaching and learning across the school.

The vast majority of parents and carers who shared their views, by talking to the inspector or responding to Ofsted's survey, were highly supportive of the school. One parent commented: 'The environment is stimulating, and the staff involve parents, making them feel valuable in their child's education.' Parents appreciate the effective communication between home and school and say that their children are encouraged and supported and, as a result, they are making good progress.

You recognise the importance of providing high-quality experiences within the curriculum. Pupils talk about the cultural knowledge they will gain during their residential visit to London or their reflections during 'Well-being Friday'. Pupils are

eager to learn and talk enthusiastically about their lessons. They say they love problem-solving in mathematics, experimenting in science, and attending extra-curricular activities, for example, choir, fencing, martial arts and dance. One pupil said: 'Learning is very important because the more you learn, the more you know.' Pupils who attend the before- and after-school club, say they enjoy being with their friends and particularly enjoy eating a healthy breakfast. This contributes positively to pupils' personal and social development.

You have dealt effectively with the areas for improvement at the last inspection. Leaders have improved the quality of teaching, which is now consistently strong, with teachers ensuring that they meet the needs of pupils with different abilities. Pupils' workbooks show that they now are given better guidance to improve their work and that new learning builds upon existing skills, knowledge and understanding.

The local governing body is responsible for the strategic development of the school. Governors share your accurate view of the strengths of the school and its areas for improvement. They have attended a range of training to support them in their roles. A skills audit is carried out regularly to ensure that governors' skills and experiences are matched carefully to the roles and interests that they hold within the local governing board. Minutes of governing body meetings show that governors support leaders but ask challenging questions which hold school leaders to account.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that there is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. Recruitment checks on the suitability of staff who work at or visit the school are detailed and thorough. Staff and governors attend safeguarding training regularly, so that they are aware of what they need to do if they have any concerns. You, as the designated safeguarding lead, make sure that any concerns are followed up swiftly and thoroughly, so that you can keep pupils safe.

Parents are confident that their children are kept safe on a daily basis. One parent said: 'Both of my children feel safe, cared for and valued.' Pupils agree with this, saying that they feel safe and are taught about how to stay safe in and outside of school and when they are online. They know the difference between behaviour issues and bullying. They say bullying is not a problem at this school but know it could happen anywhere. The pupils in the 'anti-bullying team' talk maturely about how they would deal with any bullying, if it occurred, and they are confident that staff would support them.

Inspection findings

- In 2018, the proportions of disadvantaged pupils attaining the expected standard at the end of key stages 1 and 2 were below those of other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils attaining a good level of development at the end of Reception and the expected

standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check were also below those of other pupils nationally. School leaders, including governors, scrutinise the spending of additional funding for this group of pupils. Over time, leaders have improved the quality of teaching and support for disadvantaged pupils. As a result, the school's assessment information and work in books indicates that the disadvantaged pupils currently in school are making good progress across most year groups in reading, writing and mathematics.

- In 2018, outcomes in reading and mathematics at the higher standards, at the end of key stages 1 and 2, were below the national averages. The proportion of children reaching the higher standards at the end of Reception was below average in reading, writing and mathematics. However, this is improving year on year. Leaders check that all teachers plan work which is appropriately challenging in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils say that they enjoy work which challenges them to think hard and feel proud when they achieve well. Although inspection evidence, including pupils' work in books, shows an increased proportion of most able pupils currently working at the higher standards across the school, there has been insufficient time for this to reflect in the end of key stage outcomes. Further work is needed to ensure that the most able pupils are consistently challenged and attain the higher standards.
- During this inspection, I considered the quality of learning in lessons and work in books of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Together, we agreed that pupils with SEND received effective targeted support from adults, specialist resources and work which was matched appropriately or adapted to meet their needs. Consequently, pupils with SEND are making good progress from their individual starting points.
- In 2018, girls outperformed boys in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Reception and key stage 1. I wanted to find out if teachers were providing sufficient challenge in lessons for boys. Leaders check that the quality of teaching for boys is making a positive difference to how well they learn. Work in pupils' books, observations in lessons and discussions with pupils show that all pupils are given an equal opportunity to succeed. There is very little difference between the progress made currently by different pupil groups across the school.
- Improving the attendance of pupils is a current school priority because it has been below the national averages since the last inspection. You have established systems to work closely with parents to try to reduce the high pupil absences. Over the past three years, you have slowly improved attendance and reduced the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent. However, by 2018, pupils' attendance rate still remained below average. You and your governors take a firm stance against parents taking their children on holiday in term time. Despite these actions, holidays taken in term time contribute notably to pupils' attendance being below average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to improve pupils' rates of progress, particularly in writing and mathematics, by the end of key stage 2
- challenge is consistently high for the most able pupils to increase the proportion of pupils attaining the higher standards at the end of each key stage
- they continue to improve pupils' attendance so that it at least matches the national average.

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

Yours sincerely

Alison Aitchison
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, your senior leaders, governors, and the chief executive headteacher of Inspire Multi-Academy Trust. I held telephone conversations with two school improvement advisers. Together with you, I visited all classrooms to assess the progress being made by pupils. We looked at pupils' workbooks and talked with pupils in lessons. I met with a group of pupils from Years 1 to 6 and listened to pupils read from Years 1 and 2. We considered the school's own assessment information on the progress being made by current pupils. I looked at the school's evaluation of its own performance and current plans for improvement. I looked at various documents related to safeguarding, including the single central record and recruitment of staff. We also assessed current rates of pupil attendance. I gathered views from parents at the beginning of the school day and took account of seven responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. I also received several free-text responses from parents.