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Mrs Alison Walsh
Headteacher
Palfrey Infant School
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Dear Mrs Walsh

No formal designation inspection of Palfrey Infant School

Following my visit with Christopher Stevens, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 3–4 March 2020, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector wished to determine aspects of the quality of education and whether pupils are achieving well enough.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, learning mentor, who is also the school's family support worker, and the school's business manager.

Having considered the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Safeguarding is effective.

Inspectors focused on reading and the teaching of phonics, as well as in-depth investigations into mathematics and science. We looked at some of the work pupils completed in their books and on displays in classrooms and around the school. We visited parts of lessons in all classes. Many visits were made jointly with the headteacher, deputy headteacher or a member of staff responsible for managing a

subject. Inspectors spoke with pupils during lessons. Together with you, I heard some pupils read and my colleague discussed with some pupils their mathematics and science work. I had lunch with pupils and we spoke with some informally during breaktimes. Another meeting was held with a group of pupils to discuss their views about the school, their behaviour and how safe they feel in school. Inspectors considered a range of documentation, including leaders' evaluations of the school's effectiveness and the school's development plan. I met with three governors, including the chair of the governing body. I also met with an external consultant who is commissioned by the school to provide advice and guidance.

Context

There are 359 pupils on roll. Most of them are from minority ethnic groups, and the vast majority speak English as an additional language. The range of home languages spoken is extensive as most families joining the school originate from the south Asian sub-continent, as well as an increasing number of families coming from Eastern Europe. The school serves an area of significant deprivation. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and who have education and health care plans, is above average. A significant number of pupils join the school at different times in each year group, from Nursery through to Year 2. The school has experienced significant changes to staffing and leadership since its previous inspection in 2009. You have been in post since January 2013. Staffing is stable, and there are no issues relating to recruitment and retention of staff.

You, senior leaders and governors have maintained strong and highly effective leadership. Leaders and staff are ambitious for pupils and provide excellent support for them and their families. Parents are very pleased with their children's education. They say, and they are right, that you and staff value and respect them and their children. The school's motto of 'happy children, aiming high' is clearly reflected in all that Palfrey Infant school is about.

Pupils throughout the school achieve very well in relation to their starting points. Most children in the early years join the school with skills and abilities that are well below those expected for their age. The most significant difficulty that children must overcome is their lack of language and communication skills. In addition, most children are in the very early stages of learning to speak English as an additional language. There is a great deal of catching up for these young children. Remarkably, they do catch up. The staff in the Nursery and three Reception classes provide great opportunities for children to thrive and develop in safe and stimulating indoor and outdoor areas. By the time they leave the Reception Year, many children can speak and communicate confidently.

Early reading and phonics teaching is very well organised throughout the early years and key stage 1. Teachers and support staff use consistent and effective methods to help pupils read unfamiliar or new words. By breaking down letter sounds and

combinations of letters, most pupils can blend sounds together to help them recognise words and phrases in sentences. As their skills develop and mature in Years 1 and 2, most pupils increasingly start to read with independence and confidence.

Another significant barrier holding back many pupils is their lack of vocabulary and experience of more complex words and phrases. Accurate conversational English is something many pupils do not experience enough at home, so the school does a great deal to work with families to improve pupils' speaking and listening skills. Leaders and staff are very committed and work with the school's learning and family support worker, to provide a wealth of activities and events for parents and the local community. There are regular parent workshops, story cafes, coffee mornings and special events to show parents how they can support their children's learning at home. The school works with a local adult education service to provide opportunities for parents to improve their own literacy skills so that they can support their children's reading, writing and mathematics development.

Recognising the difficulties many pupils have when trying to communicate in English, leaders and staff know that more is still needed to help all pupils read and write with full understanding. They have put in place some effective measures to broaden pupils' vocabulary and provide more complex books. 'Chapter books' provide challenge and more complex words and sentences when pupils choose new books. The school's well-stocked library is a wonderful resource and is used very well every week to encourage pupils to choose from a wide range of authors, stories and non-fiction books. The staff also invite parents to story sessions, and these are increasingly popular activities that enrich pupils' reading experiences and help them share books with their families.

From an early age in the Nursery and Reception Years, children improve their skills in writing. Early years staff use very good techniques to help children hold pencils, brushes and crayons so they can build up what is termed 'core strength' to improve their fine-motor skills and hand-eye coordination. This contributes well to developing writing skills, helping children also to draw and form letters accurately. They learn to write their names, for example, when self-registering in the Nursery. As pupils move up the school through Years 1 and 2, they develop a consistent handwriting style. Teachers are very good at helping pupils form letters and words evenly. The most capable pupils write independently, and there are many examples in books and on displays that show pupils have developed their writing skills with accurate spelling and punctuation. There is scope now to build on this by providing even more opportunities for pupils to write at length independently, using a broader range of vocabulary to enrich and extend further pupils' writing skills.

The strong foundations laid in developing pupils' language and communication skills helps them achieve very well in other subjects of the national curriculum. In mathematics, for example, pupils are taught number skills in a well-planned and ordered sequence. This helps pupils remember what they have learned before. Most

pupils learn to apply their previous knowledge of number facts to solve problems independently. Teachers have good knowledge of mathematics and understand how best to teach pupils new concepts and skills. For example, by ensuring that pupils in Year 1 are taught to visualise and handle shapes or parts of a number representing fractions, they learn that fractions are equal parts. This helps older pupils in Year 2 to recall this previous knowledge, so they can see the value of fractions recorded as a number representing equal parts of a whole. My colleague also discussed other aspects of mathematics with pupils in Year 2, for example when learning about clocks and time. He found that pupils could recall a great deal of what they learned about time in the early years and Year 1 to tackle more complex facts about time.

You and the deputy headteacher explained to me very clearly the rationale behind your intentions for the way the school's wider curriculum is planned. You described it, saying, 'We have moved away from an entirely topic-based approach to ensure that our children study discrete subjects of the national curriculum.' There is a clear rationale behind these ideas, which has helped the staff team develop and improve the quality of education. Curriculum plans are well ordered and structured so that tasks and activities help pupils learn the specific vocabulary for each subject as well the necessary skills and knowledge in each age group. In subjects like science, for example, leaders and staff have adapted their planning to ensure that pupils learn key skills, scientific knowledge and understanding in a well-planned sequence. We were very impressed with the way essential scientific facts about materials and their properties were being taught in Year 1. Pupils are given stimulating practical experiences to see at first hand the effects of heat on, say, chocolate, so that they learn why different materials adapt because of changes in temperature. In Year 2, pupils achieve very well in science, learning key facts about the human body and how it functions. I also spoke with some pupils in Years 1 and 2 who excitedly and accurately explained the importance of physical exercise and healthy eating which help 'our bodies and our heart stay healthy'.

Palfrey Infant School is a highly inclusive and supportive school community. Pupils with SEND achieve very well. The provision for SEND across the school is managed exceptionally well by the deputy headteacher. Teachers and support staff are very well trained to adapt the tasks they plan in lessons so that pupils with SEND achieve as well as their classmates. Additional support is well organised when some pupils are taught individually or in small groups, so they can read, write and communicate in lessons with their classmates in all subjects of the curriculum.

The support provided for pupils who are in the early stages of learning English as an additional language is also first class. It is remarkable to see how well newly arrived pupils who cannot speak English soon settle into school routines and begin to converse in English with their classmates. Teaching assistants and teachers adapt their lessons to ensure that all pupils can take part and learn. The range of language support provided for pupils is very effective and includes: individualised reading sessions or small group work as part of the main lesson; dual language reading books and discussions with pupils to help them understand what they are

reading; and regular parent workshops to help parents who speak a broad range of home languages to help their children's reading at home.

Pupils thrive at this school and learning is fun, practical and engaging. Leaders and staff provide a great deal of stimulating experiences for pupils that have a tremendous impact on their personal, social and academic progress, as well their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and behaviour. The outdoor forest area provides Nursery and Reception children with fun activities when preparing 'mud pancakes' for 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears'. The children share resources and observe seasonal changes to the trees and wildlife around them. Pupils care for chickens in the school's 'mini farm', and visits to places of interest, like the Houses of Parliament for Year 2 pupils, provide first-hand experiences of British democracy and its values. Children in the early years visit a local greengrocer to buy fruit and vegetables so they can bring these items back to their 'café' and prepare food. Playground buddies are proud of their roles to help children who are upset or need help at breaktimes. The 'books and beyond' challenge provides opportunities for families to read together and share stories. Regular use of professionals who visit the school helps to break down gender and social stereotypes as the children meet a male nurse or a female fire officer.

External support

You are very ambitious for the school to continue improving. The senior leadership team takes a leading role in the local consortium of schools, including two other local infant schools. These partnerships enable leaders, governors and staff to see and share best practice. They also ensure that the school has many opportunities to engage in peer-to-peer evaluations of each other's practice. This provides objective and accurate evaluations of the school's quality of education as leaders aim to learn from and promote excellence. The partnerships with other local schools also help to coordinate effective support and training for leaders and staff. The involvement of external consultants and advisers, commissioned by the school, are very effective. There is also a well-established link with initial teacher education providers to provide training experiences in the school for student teachers.

Priorities for further improvement

- Leaders are rightly focusing on improving and extending pupils' vocabulary so that they can read with more understanding. Leaders, staff and governors should also build on the start made to improve opportunities for pupils to write more extensively and independently, using a broader range of vocabulary.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Walsall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou

Her Majesty's Inspector