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Mrs Lesley Barnard
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Dear Mrs Barnard

Short inspection of Heelands School

Following my visit to the school on 23 October 2018, 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 October 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

This is an effective school where pupils' well-being and enjoyment of learning are a high priority. You display very high levels of care for your pupils and make sure that they enjoy their school experience in a safe and nurturing environment. Governors and staff embrace your vision, supporting you effectively. You have a detailed knowledge of every child in the school and are ambitious for each one to achieve the best they can.

Your leadership team has an accurate understanding of what the school does well and where improvements are needed. Leaders are relentlessly focused on continual improvement, are highly reflective and constantly evaluate the impact of any decisions. Their work to ensure that assessments are robust and accurate is proving significant in improving teachers' planning. This means that teachers are becoming more adept at adapting their teaching so that pupils learn more quickly and effectively. Leaders would further improve the progress that pupils make by regularly monitoring and evaluating the impact of teaching on learning.

The curriculum you provide is a strength of the school. Pupils are excited by their learning, and talk with great enthusiasm about lessons. The current focus on pirates is particularly popular, while the forest school supports outdoor learning extremely well. Parents and carers recognise the positive impact the curriculum is having on

their own children's progress, and a very large majority comment positively on how well teachers support their children to learn.

Parents are very complimentary about how well their children are helped to settle into school. Staff in the Reception class work well as a team to provide good support and care for children, many of whom start school with knowledge and skills below those typically expected.

In key stage 1, pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics because of the good teaching they receive. However, you acknowledge that progress has not been strong enough, particularly in reading and writing. Your plans for improvement are already having an impact and more pupils are choosing to read and write more often. Initiatives such as 'The Reading Challenge' have doubled the numbers of children reading at home in less than a year.

Phonics is planned carefully for the wide range of attainment in all classes, and outcomes have been improving over time. However, too few pupils meet the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check because good teaching is not consistent across all groups. Although pupils enjoy reading and talking about stories, they do not always use their phonics knowledge to help them read unfamiliar words.

At the time of the previous inspection, leaders were asked to improve aspects of teaching and learning by ensuring that teachers kept a close check on pupils' understanding and rate of progress in lessons, adjusting their teaching to support and challenge those who could do better. You were also asked to strengthen pupils' spoken language so that they were able to explain their ideas clearly. You were asked to check that pupils punctuate their writing correctly. In the lessons I visited, and from my scrutiny of pupils' work, it is evident that in the majority of lessons, teachers know their pupils well and adjust teaching appropriately. However, some pupils would benefit from more challenging activities. Teachers plan lessons across the curriculum with a focus on supporting the development of pupils' spoken and written language. Improvements since the last inspection are evident in lessons and pupils' work and also in the confident way that pupils express themselves.

Safeguarding is effective.

With your leadership team, you have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and procedures are rigorous. The overall culture in the school gives safeguarding the highest priority.

You review policies and procedures annually and your simple but effective systems ensure that all staff know exactly what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil's safety. Any concerns are followed up swiftly and meticulous records are maintained. You are not afraid to challenge decisions made by external professionals and make representations on behalf of pupils.

Governors review safeguarding processes regularly and effectively. All staff and governors receive appropriate safeguarding training as part of their induction.

Teachers place high importance on pupils' safety. They regularly remind pupils about internet safety. As a result, pupils know how to stay safe and minimise risk. You quite rightly challenge parents about their children's access to some areas of the internet at home. You are working closely with an external agency to offer support and training to help parents keep their children safe online.

All the parents who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, said that they know their children are safe at school. Pupils say that they feel safe and know that the adults listen to them and will help them when needed. Pupils spoke very positively about playing outside at lunchtimes because the dinner ladies made sure that everyone could play happily and safely.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, I looked at pupils' safety, the progress that pupils are making to strengthen their spoken and written language skills and the impact of leaders' work on improving attendance.
- Leaders and teachers are working hard to further develop pupils' language skills so that pupils can speak, read and write more fluently. This is helping more pupils to achieve at least the expected standards in reading and writing. Leaders have made predictions for future outcomes in reading and writing that accurately reflect the improvements in this area. You rightly acknowledge that this work will be ongoing.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who speak English as an additional language make good progress. This is because teachers and teaching assistants provide effective support for these pupils. They have a good understanding of pupils' individual starting points. As a result, they are skilled in tailoring support effectively to meet pupils' educational, emotional and social needs.
- The teaching and learning in Reception are good. Activities and resources are carefully chosen to support children's language development. Children make good progress from their different starting points, although not all have gone on to meet the national standard expected of them.
- Each day in the Reception class, teaching is planned carefully so that children's individual needs are met through a range of adult-supported and child-initiated play. Adults in the Reception class provide extra support and challenge through helpful and timely questions to extend spoken language and move learning on. For example, one boy with speech and language difficulties was making creatures from playdough. The teaching assistant said, 'Tell me about what you are making.' The enthusiastic response was very detailed as the boy explained the different parts of his creature. He was skilfully guided in his use of vocabulary by the teaching assistant.

- Pupils are developing into more enthusiastic and confident readers because teachers celebrate literature and choose texts that present challenge and ensure pupils' interest. Pupils have easy access to a wide range of books in school, and the pupils who read to me did so well. However, some key stage 1 pupils are not able to use their knowledge of phonics to help them decipher unfamiliar words.
- Pupils were keen to show me their favourite books and talk about them. One pupil talked at length about why he loves looking at an atlas, which is because he wants to find out about all the different countries and continents. However, some pupils found it difficult to answer questions about what they were reading.
- Pupils' writing is shared and celebrated across the school. Pupils are proud to be the 'Star Writer' and keenly show off their work, which is beautifully displayed for everyone to read. Your idea to keep a piece of writing from every child on the first of each month is a very effective way to see pupils' good progress over time.
- Absence and persistent absence are no longer significant issues for your school because you monitor pupils' attendance rigorously and challenge any absenteeism swiftly. Your good relationships with families often mean that pupils' attendance improves quickly and this improvement is maintained. Attendance for last year is in line with national figures and remains high at this point in this academic year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to improve the rates of progress in reading and writing for all pupils, with a focus on improving outcomes for the most able in every class
- by the end of Year 1, most pupils have reached the national standard in the phonics screening check
- the leadership team has more opportunities to work alongside teachers in their classrooms in order to have a greater impact on the progress that different groups of pupils make in reading, writing and 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 Milton Keynes. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Varnom
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your senior leaders, your school business manager, a representative from the local authority and four governors to review your evaluation of the school's effectiveness. Together with you, I walked around the school to observe learning in a number of classrooms. I spoke to parents and pupils and heard three pupils read. Together with your deputy headteacher, I scrutinised learning in a number of pupils' books, alongside your assessment information. I reviewed a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, records of pupils' attendance and documents related to keeping pupils safe.

I looked at 41 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and nine staff survey returns. I also considered the written responses of 41 parents to Parent View and met with a group of pupils. I checked the effectiveness of your safeguarding arrangements, including those related to recruitment.