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Ms Lee-Ann Britten
Headteacher
Longlands Primary School and Nursery
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Dear Ms Britten

Short inspection of Longlands Primary School and Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 27 March 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 September 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

During the time that you have been the headteacher of Longlands Primary, you have taken the school from strength to strength. You have a very clear and accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and this enables you to decide what would be best to focus on next. You have focused very well on the right priorities, particularly ensuring that the quality of teaching is at least good and that safeguarding is fully effective. As a result, the school is continuing to improve steadily and dependably.

Your determination that all pupils will be successful, and your very high aspirations for every pupil in your school, has had a clear impact on improving pupils' outcomes. The deputy headteacher shares your vision and you work well together to form an effective team. Published assessment information shows that pupils now make excellent progress in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2017 and 2015, pupils' progress in all three subjects was some of the strongest in the country. This has had a knock-on effect on the standards pupils attain by the time they leave the

school. In 2017, Year 6 pupils' attainment was above the national average in reading and writing, and well above it in mathematics.

Pupils behave extremely well, both in their classrooms and around the school. They show great interest in their work and listen carefully when their teachers talk to them. Pupils have excellent attitudes to equality and diversity and it is clear that this is, at least in part, due to the culture that you have created in the school. For example, during my meeting with a group of key stage 2 pupils, we talked about racism and other discriminatory behaviour. One pupil spoke for the group by saying, 'This school doesn't accept that.' Others explained further by saying, 'Everyone's different and special in their own way' and that you should only judge people based on 'how they act'.

You and the school's other leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning closely to ensure that it is continuing to improve. You focus well on ensuring that actions taken and changes made have a positive impact on the progress pupils make. We agreed that school improvement could be developed further by ensuring that activities are more 'joined up' so that there is a continual spiral of improvement. For example, where leaders have scrutinised a sample of pupils' work and identified areas for improvement, that these form the starting point when leaders next look at those pupils' books.

Leaders and governors have addressed the areas for improvement from the previous inspection well. The school's most-able pupils make excellent progress and attain very highly because they are challenged sufficiently in their lessons and expectations of them are high. Attendance formed one of the key lines of enquiry for this inspection and is discussed in the 'inspection findings' section of this letter. I also looked carefully at how well pupils make progress in subjects other than English and mathematics. We agreed that, although pupils achieve well, there is work still to do to improve assessment and tracking in these subjects.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have an excellent understanding of the fundamental importance of effective safeguarding. You have ensured that the school has a strong safeguarding culture and that this permeates every aspect of its work. For example, the school's single central record is kept well and meets current requirements. The school's strong stance on ensuring that only suitable people are employed to work with pupils is clearly evident.

You also understand your role as the school's designated safeguarding lead very well. You have ensured that staff are vigilant and that concerns, whether big or small, are raised with you at the earliest possible stage. Good-quality records are kept of these concerns. I have seen clear evidence that you take swift and appropriate action, when necessary, to keep pupils safe when child protection concerns arise.

Pupils feel very safe at Longlands. They have been taught well about what bullying is and what they should do if it happens to them. Pupils use the acronym 'STOP' to remind them that bullying is something that happens 'several times on purpose'. They also use the same acronym to remind them of what they should do if it occurs, that is, 'start telling other people'. As a result of this good teaching and regular reminders, pupils are well equipped to deal with bullying. They say that it happens rarely but is always sorted out quickly when it does occur.

Inspection findings

- Before the inspection, results of the Year 1 phonics screening check suggested that pupils do not make the same rapid progress in phonics as they do in other subjects. The proportion of pupils who reached the standard of the check was below the national average in 2017 and 2016. A higher than average proportion reached the required standard in 2015. Improving phonics was an element of one of the areas for development from the previous inspection.
- Longlands Primary has a far less stable population than most schools in the country. That is, a far higher proportion of pupils leave before the end of Year 6 or join after the Reception Year than is typical. This very high level of mobility has had a big impact on results of the phonics screening check in the last couple of years. Results for pupils who joined the school by the start of Year 1 were much better and were above the national average.
- Following the previous inspection, leaders took a number of appropriate actions to improve the teaching of phonics. For example, the literacy leader and a key stage 1 teacher took part in a project, led by advisers from the local authority, and the positive impact of this is clear. Pupils get off to a very good start with their phonics learning. More than half of the children in the current Reception class are working securely at a standard well above what is typical of their age. This was demonstrated clearly during the inspection when we saw children successfully reading and writing words such as 'plump', 'crept' and 'crunch', unaided, during their phonics session.
- I also looked carefully at the progress pupils make in subjects other than English and mathematics. I saw clearly before the inspection, when scrutinising published assessment information, that standards appear to be very high in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the descriptors in the inspection handbook are very clear that pupils make 'consistently strong' progress across 'a wide range of subjects' when outcomes are good and 'substantial and sustained' progress 'across the curriculum' when outcomes are outstanding.
- I looked at pupils' exercise books in several classes. There is a consistent approach throughout the school. As well as their English and mathematics books, pupils have separate exercise books for recording their work in religious education and in science, and another exercise book for other aspects of the curriculum. I found that, in all the books that I sampled, there was clear evidence that pupils were making strong progress in a range of subjects.
- You and the other leaders are currently developing the school's approach to assessment. You are now better able to measure pupils' attainment, although

this is more developed in some subjects than others. However, you are not yet fully able to track the progress that pupils make in subjects such as geography and music. It is difficult at this point to be certain whether pupils' progress could be considered 'substantial and sustained' based on their current exercise books alone. You have already identified this as an area that you want to develop further.

- Finally, I looked at what leaders are doing to improve attendance and whether it is working. Prior to the inspection, the most recent published data showed that although rates of absence and persistent absence are decreasing, they remain above average. Improving attendance was an area for development from the previous inspection.
- It is clear that leaders and governors made improving attendance a very high priority following the previous inspection. You monitor pupils' absence very closely and take appropriate action in response, when necessary. You have ensured that parents and carers understand your message that, 'every day, on time, is what we're about'. The vast majority of parents are now on board with this and attendance is continuing to improve as a result. The attitudes of a very small minority of parents have proved harder to change. For example, some parents continue to take their children on holidays during term time despite your refusal to authorise such absence. You have started to issue fixed-penalty notices, where necessary, and this has resulted in improvements in attendance.
- Attendance has improved steadily since the previous inspection. Attendance for this academic year to date is similar to the most recent national average. Persistent absence currently matches the national average with few pupils having particularly high rates of absence. The results of your tenacity are clearly evident. You are well aware that this determined approach will need to continue to ensure that attendance continues to improve.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- develop further assessment in, and tracking of, subjects other than English and mathematics
- further improve the impact of school improvement activities by ensuring that each action leads into and connects with the next.

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

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other leaders and two governors. I spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone. I met with a group of pupils and spoke with other pupils during the day. I took into account the 14 responses to Parent View, including 14 free-text comments. I also took note of the 140 responses to the school's parent survey. I observed teaching and learning, jointly with you and the deputy headteacher, in five classes. I looked at pupils' work in their classrooms and considered carefully the progress evident in a selection of pupils' exercise books. I looked at school documents including the single central record of pre-employment checks.