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Dear Miss Drake

Short inspection of Mottingham Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 17 July 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in May 2011.

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 staff have created a warm and nurturing school ethos, centred on your vision for 'educating and caring for the whole child'. The school's nine values, such as integrity, kindness and acceptance, provide a strong foundation for this work. High-quality displays capture the ways in which pupils exemplify these values in their behaviour and attitudes. For example, pupils' writing showed that they had reflected carefully on what having integrity means, with one pupil commenting: 'Integrity means you do what is right, not what is easy.' Pupils said that these values make the school a 'special place to be', and encourage them to be considerate of others.

Since the previous inspection, you have maintained the focus on improving the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. The leadership team has high expectations of what pupils know and can do. This ambition is matched with well-targeted actions to address aspects of the school's work that need to be better. For example, following disappointing outcomes in the 2016 key stage 2 mathematics assessments, leaders took effective action to improve teaching and the curriculum. Teaching now gives greater emphasis to arithmetic so that pupils acquire the knowledge they need to solve demanding mathematical problems. As a result, Year 6 pupils' progress improved considerably in the 2017 key stage 2 assessments, and was broadly similar to other schools nationally. You and your team have also successfully overseen an improvement in pupils' writing outcomes. For the past two

years, the progress of Year 6 pupils through key stage 2 has been significantly stronger than their peers in other schools. Leaders have now turned their attention to improving pupils' reading outcomes. This work is having a positive impact. However, more work is needed to ensure that pupils routinely read books that contribute well to the development of their reading skills.

Those responsible for governance have an in-depth knowledge of the school's work. They ensure that leaders provide them with high-quality information on the school's effectiveness. Governors and trustees use this information, as well as their expertise, to hold leaders to account. For example, following changes to senior staff earlier in the year, the trust took prompt action to strengthen the senior leadership team. This included the appointment of a head of school. During this period of change, you and the head of school have provided stability for the school community and restored staff morale. Crucially, you and the governing body have made sure that these changes have not compromised the good quality of education.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders, governors and staff make sure that safeguarding is 'the golden thread' that runs through all aspects of school life. Strong levels of pastoral care, for pupils and families, form the basis of this work. You and your team are skilled in providing parents and carers with well-targeted guidance so that they can support their child's emotional and physical welfare. Where appropriate, you are quick to draw on additional provision from external agencies, including counselling services, so that pupils and families receive the right level of help.

Staff are well trained in safeguarding issues, including the risks that are most prevalent in the community the school serves. The safeguarding team checks that adults working in the school understand their duties to safeguard pupils. Records of child protection concerns are well maintained and appropriately detailed.

Those responsible for governance keep a close eye on the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements. They visit the school regularly to ensure that leaders and staff fulfil their responsibilities to promote pupils' welfare. The single central record of pre-employment checks is updated regularly. Leaders carry out the required checks on adults working in the school, including volunteers and agency staff.

Pupils feel safe in school. They told inspectors that there are 'lots of adults to talk to' if they feel worried. Pupils said that bullying or unkind behaviour is rare. The school's values play an important role in helping pupils to feel happy and secure. As one pupil put it: 'The value of kindness reminds us to always let someone join in so no one gets lonely.' The majority of parents agree that their children are safe and well cared for in school.

Inspection findings

- For the first line of enquiry, I focused on pupils' outcomes in reading. In 2017, Year 1 pupils' attainment in the phonics screening check was considerably below the national expectation.
- The early years provides children with a strong start in phonics. Teaching provides well-chosen opportunities for children to practise their phonics knowledge, including exciting topics that motivate children to write.
- You and your team have taken effective steps to improve the quality of phonics teaching in key stage 1. Pupils typically benefit from daily phonics teaching that takes account of what they already know or can do. Pupils enjoy reading and use their phonics knowledge confidently to read unfamiliar words. As a result, attainment in phonics is rising. Assessment information shows an increase in the proportion of pupils acquiring age-expected phonics knowledge.
- However, lower-attaining pupils read books that are too difficult for them. Staff do not make sure that pupils have the necessary phonics knowledge to read many of the words in their reading books. When this is the case, pupils guess at words or rely on clues in pictures to understand what they read. This prevents lower-attaining pupils from becoming confident, accurate and fluent readers at the earliest possible stage.
- I also considered the older pupils' reading outcomes. Pupils' progress during key stage 2 has improved over the past three years. In 2017, it was broadly in line with the national average. However, pupils' attainment by the end of Year 6 was below their peers in other schools. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils.
- You have reviewed the school's approach to the teaching of reading, giving greater weight to activities and texts that strengthen pupils' vocabulary and comprehension skills. Leaders have increased the range and quality of books available, and introduced a number of approaches to ensure that pupils read regularly. Pupils spoke with enthusiasm about their enjoyment of reading, and how the school provides books that make them want to read.
- The impact of leaders' work is evident in the increasing proportion of pupils working at the standard expected for their age in reading, including those pupils who are disadvantaged. However, leaders and staff do not check that pupils choose appropriately demanding books when reading for pleasure. Sometimes, pupils choose books with vocabulary and content that is too easy for them. This prevents pupils, particularly the most able, from making as much progress as they could in reading.
- As part of their drive to strengthen leadership, the trust appointed several new middle leaders this year. My second line of enquiry explored the impact of their work.
- Your new team has an accurate understanding of the school's priorities. Leaders are determined to improve pupils' outcomes and feel well supported by you and the trust. You are providing middle leaders with appropriate guidance and

training to develop their leadership skills. As a result, they are increasingly checking that their actions make a positive difference to how well pupils learn.

- You explained that the school's strong focus on pupils' well-being plays a pivotal role in maintaining their good outcomes. My final line of enquiry evaluated this aspect of the school's work.
- Your curriculum makes strong provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Through a well-planned programme of projects and assemblies, pupils have ample opportunities to reflect on and celebrate what makes them unique as individuals. For example, in one recent project, pupils contributed a card to a 'diversity tree' display, which celebrated their qualities and heritage. In English, carefully chosen texts enable pupils to explore complex moral issues with maturity and confidence. For instance, in response to reading one book, Year 6 pupils produced high-quality writing on the themes of acceptance and bullying.
- Pupils told me that the broad range of extra-curricular activities, including trips and clubs, help them to enjoy school and work hard. Leaders use a range of strategies to promote good levels of attendance so that pupils make the most of the experiences the school has to offer. Leaders work constructively with external agencies and families to provide personalised support for pupils with high levels of absence. Despite leaders' efforts, persistent absence levels are high. Pupils' attendance remains stubbornly below the national average. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- in key stage 1, lower-attaining pupils regularly read books that are matched to their phonics knowledge
- older pupils make ambitious and adventurous choices in the books they read for pleasure to stretch their vocabulary and comprehension skills
- pupils attend school as regularly as they should so that their learning is not adversely affected by high levels of absence.

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 Bromley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Murphy-Dutton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and your leadership team to discuss the impact of leaders' work to maintain the good quality of education. I held meetings with members of the governing body and representatives from the academy trust, including the chief executive officer. I listened to pupils from Years 1, 2 and 5 read, and talked to them about their experiences of school. I visited classrooms together with senior leaders and looked at samples of pupils' work. Documentation related to attendance, pupils' outcomes and safeguarding was reviewed. The views of parents were considered through the 37 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire (Parent View), including written comments. I also spoke to parents informally at the end of the school day.