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Mrs Sarah Mitchell
Headteacher
Ash Hill Primary School
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Dear Mrs Mitchell

Short inspection of Ash Hill Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 February 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You provide enthusiastic and knowledgeable leadership, ably supported by your assistant headteachers. The school is a place where hard work and a 'can-do' attitude are valued and rewarded. Your ambition and clear goals for the school, captured in the motto, 'Growing minds for learning, crafting skills for life', are shared both by leaders and governors alike. Staff feel valued and enjoy working at Ash Hill. Parents and carers recognise the high expectations you have for pupils and staff. All parents who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire said that they would recommend the school. Officers from your local authority use your knowledge and expertise to support other local schools to improve further.

Pupils enjoy coming to Ash Hill Primary School. They say their lessons are fun and that they have 'lovely' teachers. Pupils are enthusiastic about their learning. Behaviour throughout the school is consistently positive. The well-developed behaviour management system helps pupils take responsibility for their own behaviour. Pupils understand rewards and consequences well, and particularly enjoy the opportunity to spend their tokens at the Smart Cart. Pupils are enthusiastic about the many leadership roles they can apply for, including the role of Ash Hill Ambassador.

The previous inspection report highlighted the school's many strengths, including effective leadership, good progress and stimulating learning opportunities. You have maintained these strengths. At the last inspection, leaders were asked to increase

challenge for the most able pupils. You have taken effective action to improve this aspect of the school's work. We agreed, however, that the level of challenge in reading could be increased further. The previous report also asked leaders to improve achievement in writing in key stage 1. High standards and strong progress in pupils' writing are now evident throughout the school.

You understand the many strengths of the school but also know that there are still areas to work on. At the end of Year 2, in 2017, pupils' attainment in mathematics was below the national average. You have responded by improving the teaching of mathematics across the school. However, we agreed that pupils' mathematical reasoning skills need to be developed further.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders and governors fulfil their statutory safeguarding duties well. Policies and procedures are fit for purpose and day-to-day routines are secure. Pre-employment checks to ensure the suitability of all adults who work or volunteer are fully in place. Leaders work successfully with outside agencies to support pupils and their families. Safeguarding training is regular and up to date. As a result, staff and governors understand their roles and responsibilities well. Staff have created a very nurturing environment. As one parent commented, 'The children are all happy and well looked after.'

Attendance figures have been below the national average in recent years, and the proportion of pupils frequently absent has been high. Leaders now closely track the attendance of pupils whose levels of absence are a concern. They work effectively with these pupils and families to reduce absence and, as a result, current attendance is better. Leaders acknowledge that there is still work to do to ensure that all pupils attend school regularly.

All pupils I spoke to feel safe in school and know who to talk to if they are worried. They told me there is no bullying in the school, 'as we know it is not nice to bully'. Leaders have ensured that the curriculum includes many opportunities for pupils to learn how to stay safe in a wide range of situations. For example, pupils told me about their regular workshops focusing on the school's values, emotional intelligence, and developing their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. These workshops have taught pupils effectively about the different types of bullying, and what to do if they see it happening. Pupils also have a strong knowledge of how to keep themselves safe online.

Inspection findings

- In 2017, by the end of Year 6, the proportion of pupils who reached the higher standards in reading and mathematics was below that seen nationally. Leaders have responded swiftly to these results. During my visits to lessons, I saw the most able pupils challenged appropriately in their work in mathematics. Feedback to pupils is specific. Teachers use assessment within lessons effectively to ensure that pupils make strong progress. Leaders acknowledge that challenge in reading is less developed. Evidence in pupils' books shows that they are not yet using a

wide range of comprehension skills and, as a result, reading progress is slower.

- The progress pupils made in writing by the end of key stage 2, in 2017, was well above the national average. During the inspection, we examined whether these notable results were sustainable. My classroom visits, which included the scrutiny of pupils' work, showed me that standards in writing are high. Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are making strong progress. They have many opportunities to write at length across the curriculum and present their work neatly. Their basic writing skills are secure. Pupils know how to improve their writing by using their well-developed editing and evaluation skills. They enjoy their writing lessons. For example, Year 6 pupils showed me their work from a recent 'writing day'. They had turned their classroom into an Italian restaurant and, following this experience, wrote strongly worded, high-quality letters of complaint.
- In order to improve attainment and progress in mathematics, leaders have introduced new teaching strategies. There is an increased focus on problem solving which is having a positive impact on standards. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the quality of mathematics teaching across the school. The assistant headteachers check on this regularly by visiting lessons, talking to pupils, looking at books and evaluating assessment information. Feedback to staff is specific and expectations are clear, and linked closely to effective professional development. Leaders' forensic analysis of the gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding ensures that pupils who are falling behind rapidly catch up. However, we agreed that the teaching of reasoning skills and the opportunities that pupils have to use their skills independently could be further developed.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- rates of attendance match or exceed national averages, with a sharp focus on those who are regularly absent
- teachers increase the challenge in reading lessons by giving pupils the opportunity to use and apply a wider range of comprehension skills, so more pupils reach the higher standard in reading
- teachers increase the opportunities for mathematical reasoning so more pupils reach the expected standard by the end of key stage 1, and a greater proportion of pupils reach the higher standard by the end of key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Lea Hannam
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your two assistant headteachers to discuss the school's effectiveness. We visited lessons to observe pupils learning, speak to them and look at their work. We looked at the quality of pupils' work in books. I considered 25 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the free-text comments from some. Responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil questionnaires were also considered. I spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day, and to a representative from the local authority on the telephone. I met with three governors, including the chair of the governing body, and spoke to a group of pupils about their school. I evaluated the school's safeguarding arrangements. A wide range of documents were examined, including: your school's self-evaluation and school improvement planning; pupils' progress information; records of leaders' checks on teaching; and attendance information and policies.