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Mrs Susanne Dove  
Headteacher  
Heathwood Lower School  
Heath Road  
Leighton Buzzard  
Bedfordshire  
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Dear Mrs Dove

### **Short inspection of Heathwood Lower School**

Following my visit to the school on 13 December 2017, 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 last inspection. On taking up your role as headteacher in September 2014, you accurately and incisively appraised the school's strengths and identified areas for further development to ensure that it remained good. You have worked with vigour and determination to secure a high quality of education for all pupils, taking timely and effective action when required. This has included making changes in teaching staff and strengthening the school's senior leadership team. Consequently, you have ensured that the areas for improvement at the time of the last inspection have been fully addressed.

The school's values underpin all aspects of school life. Pupils show caring attitudes towards each other and are very accepting of those pupils who receive additional support because they have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Heathwood has a higher than average proportion of pupils who have education, health and care plans because it provides specialist language provision. The number of such pupils is high in Year 1 and Year 3. These pupils are well supported through individual specialist language support outside the classroom and additional adults within the classroom. This enables them to make good progress from their individual starting points.

Governors are very effective in the way that they both challenge and support leaders. This is because they are knowledgeable and skilful in their interpretation of

school information. Additionally, governors are proactive in making suggestions for the school's further improvement.

Pupils I met and spoke with were confident and mature. They talked happily about their work. They enjoy a variety of opportunities to take on responsibilities, such as through the school council, sports council and fairtrade council. Older pupils act as playground buddies for younger children. Pupils enjoy coming to school and their behaviour in lessons and when moving around the school site is impeccable.

The curriculum provides pupils with interesting learning experiences, enriched by a variety of visits and visitors. Pupils enjoy the broad range of clubs that are available to them and also the enrichment activities which take place on Friday afternoons. During the inspection, all pupils were engaged in learning activities planned around the same text, which supported their learning in a variety of subjects. For example, some pupils in Year 2 wrote high-quality poems, while others in Year 4 produced excellent sketches.

Parents speak very positively about the work of the school and would recommend it to others. One commented: 'I couldn't ask for a warmer, friendlier approach to a school. The teachers work hard to ensure that all children's individual needs are met and their potential reached. It is an amazing school.'

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school's checks and records in relation to the safe recruitment of staff are fully compliant with the government's requirements. The chair of governors makes regular checks on safeguarding practice.

Leaders make sure that all staff receive regular and thorough training in all aspects of safeguarding. The school's safeguarding records are well organised. They show that staff know what signs to look for which may indicate that a pupil is at risk and you ensure that follow-up action is taken swiftly.

Pupils told me that one of the best things about the school is that 'everyone gets along well'. They understand what bullying is but say that it rarely happens. If bullying does happen, pupils are confident their teachers will deal with it effectively. Those who responded to the pupil survey also echoed this view.

### **Inspection findings**

- My first focus was to see how effective leadership is across the school and whether all areas for improvement from the previous inspection report have been addressed. You joined the school in September 2014 and have made changes to the senior leadership team. I wanted to see if there was good capacity for sustained improvement.
- I found that the priorities identified in your school development plan are accurate and the actions cited to bring these about are appropriate. I further identified

that your subject leaders for English and mathematics, who also share one of the assistant headteacher roles, have a firm grasp of the strengths and areas for improvement in their subject areas. They are taking the right actions to bring these about and their passion for their work shines through.

- For example, in mathematics, the need to improve both mathematical fluency and pupils' reasoning skills has been identified. The purchase of an interactive system which allows pupils to practise their tables and number facts is having a positive impact. Changes to the way phonics is taught have brought about a marked improvement in the proportion of pupils who reached the required standard in the phonics check at the end of Year 1 in 2017. New approaches to the way that reading and writing are taught are also bringing about improvements in pupils' work and progress across the school.
- The previous inspection report identified improving the achievement of the most able pupils as an area for improvement. In 2015, the proportion of pupils who achieved the higher level 3 at the end of key stage 1 was above the national average. A high proportion of pupils exceeded age-related expectations at the end of Year 4 in 2017, indicating that all pupils, including the most able, had made good progress since the end of Year 2.
- In 2016, the proportion of pupils achieving at greater depth in reading at the end of key stage 1 was above the national average. That for mathematics was in line and that for writing below. In 2017, the proportions achieving greater depth in all three areas were above the national averages. The work in current pupils' books shows that all pupils, including the most able, receive appropriate challenge and are achieving well.
- My next focus was on the early years. This is because for several years, the proportion of children achieving the expected good level of development at the end of the early years has been below average. You identified this as a key area for improvement when you took up your post as headteacher. Following a change in staffing, outcomes improved substantially in 2016, although they remained below average. In 2017, this improvement has been maintained.
- You are rightly disappointed that there was no further improvement in outcomes in 2017. We explored the individual children in this cohort who did not achieve a good level of development. They are now in Year 1 and are making good progress from their individual starting points.
- Provision in the current Reception class is stimulating both inside and out. We saw children talking animatedly about the pantomime they had watched. Some were developing their phonics and letter formation skills, writing with coloured paints in the snow that had recently fallen. Others delighted in trying to make an igloo. A higher proportion of these children are on track to achieve a good level of development than in previous years, as a result of the changes to planning and assessment that have been put in place recently.
- Children in the pre-school setting, including two-year-olds, get off to a good start as a result of good provision. However, not all of these children move up to the Reception Year. Consequently, there is a wide variation in the skills of children starting in this class.

- You have plans to improve provision in the early years still further, including transition arrangements, to ensure that more children are well prepared for Year 1 by the end of the Reception Year.
- My final focus was on progress in key stage 2. Your current Year 4 teachers are both trained moderators for the local authority. They work with other schools in the area to ensure that teacher assessment is accurate and regularly compare the work of your pupils in reading, writing and mathematics with that of pupils in other schools to ensure that assessments are accurate.
- You have introduced a new system for tracking pupils' progress in all subjects, which is ensuring greater accuracy. The quality of work in pupils' books in the current Year 4 shows that many are already demonstrating that they are working at end of year age-related expectations. This indicates good progress from their starting points at the end of Year 2. Pupils' work supports your predictions that the proportions of pupils who achieve at and above age-related expectations by the end of Year 4 are again likely to be above the local authority averages for lower schools.
- We noticed when looking in pupils' books that not all present their work as neatly as they could and that there are a few inconsistencies across classes. We also saw that some older pupils are not consistently spelling all the words they should correctly. You have already identified these areas for development and have appropriate plans to address them.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- implement plans to improve pupils' spelling and presentation, particularly in key stage 2, in order to raise standards in writing still further across the school
- further improve outcomes at the end of the early years to make sure that more children are well prepared for Year 1.

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

Yours sincerely

Joan Beale  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I discussed the work of the school with you, subject leaders and two governors, including the chair of the governing body. I held telephone conversations with a representative from the local authority and your school improvement partner. You

and I visited all classrooms together to observe teaching, learning and assessment and looked at the work in pupils' books in a range of subjects.

I met with a group of eight pupils to talk about their experiences at school and also talked more informally with pupils in lessons about their learning.

I scrutinised safeguarding policies and practice, including systems for the safe recruitment of staff. I considered a wide range of other documentation, including the school's own evaluation of its work and plans for improvement.

I took account of 112 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 19 comments received electronically. I also spoke with 16 parents when they were delivering their children to school. I further considered 19 responses to the staff questionnaire and 45 responses to the pupil survey.