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Mrs Julia Barlow
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Dear Mrs Barlow

Short inspection of Knowsley Village School

Following my visit to the school on 16 January 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 a good quality of education since the previous inspection. Since then, you have initiated many changes, all of which have helped to ensure that teaching is effective and progress is good across the school. You are determined to ensure that pupils in Knowsley Village School enjoy academic and social pursuits, become resilient learners and realise their potential. You have thought long and hard about the best way to organise the senior leadership team, which you have recently reinvigorated. This team, including a new deputy headteacher, phase and subject leaders, is very experienced. Members are long-serving teachers who are trained well and eager to support you in your endeavours. Collectively, they have the capacity to improve the school.

Governors are highly knowledgeable and share your ambitions. They have an in-depth knowledge of the school because you provide them with comprehensive reports. These reports include accurate information about how well the school is performing and what it needs to do to further improve. However, and more importantly, governors know exactly how well the school is doing because they challenge you and ask pertinent questions. In addition, they come into school to meet staff, pupils and parents and carers. Governors' first-hand experience makes them well placed to assist you in moving the school forward to its next stage of development.

The school is calm and purposeful. Pupils are very well behaved and appreciative of their new classrooms and library. They are considerate, welcoming and focused on doing their best. Pupils try very hard to learn from their mistakes and persevere with their work when it is challenging. Pupils enjoy ice skating, football, gymnastics and dance and thrive in the caring and nurturing ethos you and leaders have created.

Parents do not have a bad word to say about the school. Those I met, as well as those who sent in texts during the inspection, were all very complimentary about the school. Typically, they stated that 'the school creates a lovely environment for pupils and parents', 'my children are delighted to attend the school every day' and 'the school is fantastic, children make such good progress.'

The previous inspection identified the need to improve writing. Specifically, you were asked to provide pupils with opportunities to develop and practise their writing skills across the curriculum. Teachers' strengthened subject knowledge and consistently good English language teaching have significantly improved pupils' writing skills. During our scrutiny of pupils' written work, I looked at many examples of extended writing, as well as detailed expositions linked to various topics in history. Pupils clearly enjoy writing and are increasingly challenged. This is building up pupils writing stamina and improving their grammar, punctuation and spelling. However, as you know, teachers need to challenge pupils even further to develop their depth of understanding in both English and mathematics. Pupils enjoy reading and are extending their reading repertoire. As we discussed, there is more work to do to introduce pupils to a wider range of authors and writing styles.

Another aspect to improve was the skill of leaders to analyse information and use this in future planning. You have provided support and training on effective use of data. Correctly, you judge that senior leaders, teachers and governors have a precise understanding of pupils' performance. You use this information, and information gained from your regular monitoring of the quality of teaching, for planning purposes. This helps you to set teachers' targets and identify any groups of pupils in danger of falling behind their peers.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Pupils I spoke with said that they always feel safe and well looked after at school. They told me that there is no bullying. They know that any concerns they have will be dealt with immediately. They understand the harm that racism and homophobic bullying cause and know that everyone should be treated with dignity and respect.

Every parent who completed Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, said that their children are safe and happy at school. Those who spoke with me directly and those who sent in text messages shared this view.

Staff are familiar with the latest guidelines on keeping children safe in education. They have regular training to update their knowledge and understanding of safeguarding. Those I spoke to were very precise about what they would do if they suspected that a child was being neglected or if a child approached them seeking advice and support.

Governors are trained effectively and understand the importance of safeguarding. The designated safeguarding governor works with you and senior leaders to make sure that the school is a safe place for pupils to learn and thrive.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry for this inspection was to establish how effective the school's work is to raise levels of achievement for disadvantaged pupils and to find out how effectively senior leaders use additional funding. The full 'root and branch' review carried out by the school and the local authority's external evaluation in this area provided you with quality information on what the school is doing well and where there is still more to be done. The actions that you have taken in view of these activities have been highly effective in diminishing differences between disadvantaged pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics and that of other pupils nationally.
- You have a knowledgeable senior leader and a governor monitoring the support available for disadvantaged pupils. Teaching staff regularly report on the progress made by disadvantaged pupils. You use highly effective data management systems to assess the impact of interventions and tailored programmes. Senior leaders are quick to discontinue any programmes that are not supporting pupils in their learning.
- I observed with you disadvantaged pupils' engagement in learning. My discussions with them indicate that they enjoy coming to school because learning is exciting. From a scrutiny of pupils' books, it is clear that they make good progress across the school in a wide range of subjects.
- My next line of enquiry was pupils' attainment in reading. This was because national data indicates that pupils' progress in reading has been below average at the end of key stage 2 for the last two years. You are well aware of this and have taken effective action to buck the trend. Your work with parents in this area has been a big hit. Parents know how important reading is and are increasingly encouraging their children to read at home.
- In-school data indicates that pupils' progress in reading is improving across the school. The school's new library is helping to raise the profile of reading, as are reading ambassadors and their work to promote the written word. Year 5 pupils take on their 'reading buddy' responsibilities in earnest, as they listen to children read in the Reception class. My discussions with pupils about their reading revealed that while pupils are expanding their reading repertoire, their knowledge of authors is limited, as is their appreciation of different writing genres.
- I wanted to look specifically at phonics, as a separate line of enquiry, and assess how well it is taught in key stage 1 and the early years. This was because the

proportion of pupils secure in their phonic skills and knowledge at the national phonics screening check, though steadily rising, was still below average at the end of Year 1 in 2017. You have taken appropriate action to improve pupils' performance. The training which staff have had to support the teaching of phonics has been particularly effective. Due to this, many Year 1 pupils have already reached a high standard in phonics. Pupils who read to me used their phonic skills successfully to sound out and read unfamiliar words. The early years leader is aware of the importance of setting down solid foundations for children, starting with phonics. With her staff, she is ensuring that children develop secure skills in this area. These are helping children to become confident readers in key stage 1 and beyond.

- My final line of enquiry relates to the work the school is doing to challenge pupils in their learning. Linked to this, I wanted to find out what actions are in place to develop pupils' resilience and ability to learn from their mistakes. The reason for this focus relates directly to pupils' performance in national tests in 2017. For example, a below-average proportion of pupils attained greater depth in reading and mathematics at the end of key stage 2.
- When I spoke with pupils about their learning, most of them said that work was usually hard or set at just the right level. You assured me that pupils were increasingly opting to engage in more challenging writing and problem-solving activities. Pupils indicated that they are set tasks at 'good', 'awesome' and 'amazing' levels, the latter being the most difficult. They told me that they are increasingly selecting the most difficult challenges. However, some said that work could be even harder. From my scrutiny of pupils' work and observations, I agree that work could be harder. Pupils' conscientious and studious behaviour places them well to be further challenged and to find things out for themselves, before seeking help from adults.
- Leaders are monitoring closely the improvement in progress. You have raised the bar high for teachers, as indicated in the ambitious targets you set them. You insist that at least 85% of pupils in each class should make good or better progress in reading, writing and mathematics. School information, and work in pupils' books, shows that almost all teachers have reached this target.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' resilience in class is enhanced and they are further challenged to develop their depth of understanding in English and mathematics
- more opportunities are provided for pupils to familiarise themselves with a wider range of authors and genres.

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

Yours sincerely

Lenford White
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior and middle leaders, including those responsible for English and mathematics. I met with four governors including the chair, administrative staff and pupils. I held a meeting with a representative from the local authority. You and I visited lessons in both key stage 1 and key stage 2 and undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work books.

I examined a range of documentary evidence, including development plans, checks on the quality of teaching, safeguarding documentation, including risk assessments, various records of pupils' attendance and behaviour, and the school's records and checks on the suitability of staff to work with children. In addition, I scrutinised your reviews of the school's performance.

Questionnaires submitted by four members of staff were examined. I considered the views of 23 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 19 free-text messages. I reviewed the school's own surveys of pupils' views.