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Ms Lisa Munday  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Munday

### **Short inspection of Cedars Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 28 June 2016, 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 2011.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection in 2011. Following this inspection, some pupils' achievement dipped. However, since joining the school in 2013, you have made systematic improvements. You have identified any weaknesses precisely and tackled them wholeheartedly. The high expectations you hold for pupils are shared by all. As a result, pupils' outcomes have improved and are set to improve further in 2016.

You have worked effectively with leaders and governors to imbue a strong sense of rigour throughout all aspects of the school's work. Your expectations are effectively realised through the school's guiding principles, known as 'The Cedars Way'. You insist that pupils treat each other kindly and gently and give of their best. Your staff take every opportunity to reinforce these high expectations. Of note is the way teachers and assistants tell pupils clearly and directly how well they have done and what improvements they need to make. Pupils feel well supported by this and view it as contributing to their long-term success. One pupil described the robust feedback he had received as helping him 'for the future'.

Together, you and the deputy headteacher have made many changes, which have improved those areas identified in the previous inspection report. You have systematically improved the curriculum and increased the opportunities for pupils to practise, extend and refine their writing skills in all the subjects they study. In addition, you have strengthened the contribution that subject and year group

leaders make. Close monitoring of the quality of teaching and assessment ensures that effective approaches are consistent between classes and subjects. In addition, you have astutely sought to have your judgements about the quality of teaching validated by the local authority and consultants from outside the authority. You have rightly focused much of your attention on writing, following weaker outcomes in 2015. Information from current assessments shows that improvements in teaching are having a positive impact on how well pupils write.

You and your leaders have introduced a number of new approaches that have been successful, including in the early years setting. Following a thorough analysis of pupils' performance information, you have sensibly focused on closing any gaps between the achievement of boys and girls. There has been an improvement in the proportion of children reaching a good level of development. This is now well above national average for 2015 and gaps between the proportion of boys and girls reaching a good level of development have closed. You have effectively developed the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make). This has led to a higher percentage of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics check in 2016. Gaps between the proportion of boys achieving this check, compared to girls, have continued to close.

Subject leaders have worked closely with teachers to improve the teaching of grammar, punctuation and spelling. As a result, pupils' writing is accurate, clear and well structured. You and your leaders have introduced a series of non-negotiables in mathematics and these have enabled pupils to enhance their problem-solving skills. You have insisted that pupils are challenged by the pace of learning and the feedback they receive. However, pupils' responses sometimes suggest their knowledge and understanding are more advanced than teachers anticipated. Teachers do not always respond to this by setting the more demanding tasks pupils require. You have worked very well with other local leaders to ensure that expertise is effectively harnessed. In particular, you have collaborated well with leaders from local schools to establish robust procedures to check the accuracy of teachers' assessments. Consequently, when your writing assessments were checked by the local authority this year, they were found to be accurate.

Governance is effective and has got stronger since the new chair of the governing body recently took up her post. She has stepped up the rigour with which governors hold leaders to account for the impact of changes. Of note is the way governors now check pupils' books regularly to ascertain the progress pupils make. The chair of the governing body and the vice-chair are clear that changes need to make a palpable difference to pupils. To this end, they have requested that subject and year group leaders provide reports about the progress that different groups of pupils make, including disadvantaged pupils. Governors rigorously scrutinise these reports and ask leaders to account for any variations.

You, your leaders and your governors have made many changes in a relatively short period of time. Nevertheless, you enjoy a high degree of approval among staff and pupils. The vast majority of parents who responded to the Parent View survey indicated that they would recommend the school. Most comments made by parents on the free text facility within Parent View were also positive. One parent

commented, 'My child has had a wonderful start to her education at Cedars and it's all thanks to the nurturing environment provided by the hardworking and enthusiastic staff.' However, a number of parents raised concerns. The majority of these related to communication between the school and parents. These comments indicate that the work you have sensibly started on improving communication with parents and other stakeholders, through, for example, surveys and questionnaires, needs further development. You have already identified this as a next step and have well-focused plans in place.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You and your leaders place a strong and effective focus on keeping pupils and children safe. In your capacity as designated safeguarding lead (and lead for looked after children), you have unfalteringly provided the support necessary to assist pupils in surmounting any barriers to success at school. This includes employing a mentor to provide one-to-one support for targeted pupils. You have developed a strong and effective working relationship with the local authority's welfare officers. You make good use of intelligence garnered through your collaboration with local headteachers to strengthen the referrals you make to them. Your record keeping is tight in all areas of safeguarding. This includes keeping an accurate list of the safeguarding training staff have accessed.

You regularly review safeguarding procedures and have recently improved those for gathering children together ready for them to be collected by staff from the after-school club. This is indicative of your reflective approach and your determination to make procedures and practice as effective as they possibly can be.

### **Inspection findings**

- Leaders monitor the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' achievement carefully and rigorously. They have sensibly had their judgments validated by external consultants. They unfalteringly tackle any aspects that are less effective. As a result, outcomes for pupils in 2016 are set to be strong.
- The new chair of the governing body has strengthened governance so it is more focused on strategy rather than day-to-day matters. This includes holding you and your leaders to account for the impact of the changes you have made. You are rightly developing the way you communicate with parents about these changes and other matters. This is so that parents, including parent governors, are better informed about the decisions you make and why you make them.
- The early years leader's well-focused actions have led to improvements in children's progress. Of note is the way children make an effective start on their journeys to being confident and competent writers. For example, in the Nursery, children, including those with additional needs, are given opportunities to explore how to tell stories by combining pictures and words. This has led to a rising trend in the percentage of pupils achieving a good level of development.
- Leaders have successfully worked with teachers and assistants to improve

the teaching of phonics. Of note is how well pupils read to each other, demonstrating their understanding of the meaning of words by varying their tone of voice. Pupils who need additional help with learning to read are particularly well supported, including in small groups. There has been a rising trend in the percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard in the phonics check, and in 2016 it stands at 89%.

- The curriculum is effective and is developing pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding in core and non-core subjects. Teachers have successfully developed pupils' ability to convey their nuanced understanding of non-core subjects through writing. For example, pupils wrote speeches inspired by Winston Churchill's famous war speeches. In so doing they demonstrated the ability to write persuasively and also carefully selected the best historical facts to use in the speech.
- Leaders have introduced a new approach to assessing pupils' learning which is helping you to reinforce your high expectations. In addition, you have worked well with local schools to ensure that the approach is accurate. Information from teachers' assessments show that in most year groups, pupils' progress is accelerating and the small gaps between the small numbers of disadvantaged pupils and others are closing, as are gaps between boys and girls.
- Subject and year group leadership has been successfully developed. Subject and year group leaders effectively guide class teachers and assistants so they are fully versed in the new approaches the school has agreed to adopt. They closely monitor teaching to check if these new approaches are being consistently employed and are working well enough. In particular, new non-negotiables introduced into the teaching of mathematics have enabled pupils to cope well with the increased demands in key stage 1 and 2 tests.
- You insist on high standards and have made changes that have established more rigour and a greater level of challenge for most pupils. For instance, you set pupils carefully thought-out reading preparations tasks. You also provide them with well-planned follow-up work, which has helped develop pupils' ability to read between the lines and infer meaning from text. Pupils' achievement in reading is a strength.
- In lessons, inspectors observed that pupils were required to work at pace and check their own work for mistakes. Assistants work well with pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to ensure that they also develop the skills necessary to check their work. In a small number of lessons, teachers missed opportunities to challenge pupils further by setting more demanding work when pupils' responses indicated their knowledge and understanding of a topic was already developed. Pupils commented on this when inspectors spoke with them.
- Across the school, there is a high degree of consistency in the approach teachers and assistants adopt and the standards they expect. Teachers and assistants ask pupils penetrating questions and provide them with direct and honest feedback. Pupils appreciate this because they want to succeed. They keep their books neat and show pride in their work.
- Your high standards extend across all aspect of the school's work, including behaviour. Pupils adhere very well to the principles known as 'The Cedars Way'. These guiding principles focus on ensuring that all pupils are included

and feel valued. They link closely to the way you allocate rewards and employ sanctions. You tackle the very rare incidents when pupils show intolerance, including through discriminatory language, directly and robustly.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- when pupils demonstrate higher levels of knowledge, skills and understanding than anticipated, teachers respond by setting tasks that are more demanding
- effective plans to improve communication between parents and the school are fully implemented.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for Milton Keynes. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you and the deputy headteacher, as well as subject and year group leaders, the vice-chair of the governing body accompanied by a governor, a group of pupils, and a representative from the local authority. I met parents informally at the end of the school day. I had a telephone conversation with the chair of the governing body and separately with a parent governor. Short visits were made to a number of lessons, most of which were accompanied by a member of the senior leadership team to observe teaching and look at work in pupils' books. I observed pupils' behaviour in a range of situations, including in lessons and around school. The 39 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 19 comments that parents made on free text were considered. Her Majesty's Inspector also considered 44 responses to the staff questionnaire and analysed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the latest improvement plan, information about pupils' progress, and safeguarding documentation.