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Mrs Sandra Pennington
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Pennington

Short inspection of Northfield Manor Primary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 17 July 2018 with Ann Pritchard, HMI, 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 January 2013.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Since your appointment in September 2017, you have rapidly identified the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching and learning across the school and have lost no time in addressing the key issues. You have developed a close-knit team which appreciates the support and professional development opportunities that you have given it. There is a climate of trust across the school, and staff feel that the school is well led. Through effective leadership, pupils' achievements in mathematics have improved over time and are now a strength of the school. There remains some variability in the quality of teaching, especially in phonics, reading and for disadvantaged pupils. The new leadership team is in the early stages of operation and the impact of its actions to further improve the school are yet to be seen. However, you have carefully structured this new team to meet the development needs of the school.

You and your staff have a strong focus on developing the whole child. This is further reinforced through the wider curriculum. For example, pupils work with older local residents to develop their gardens. This creates a sense of how pupils can contribute to their local community. The school's strong focus on performing arts enables pupils to develop their creative talents. Parents and carers express very positive views about the school, especially about the wider enrichment opportunities

within the curriculum. One comment, typical of many expressed by parents, was: 'I chose this school for its holistic approach to the child as an individual and I value their methods of supporting, encouraging and developing each child's unique abilities and interests.' Pupils show respect and care for themselves, their friends and all adults. Pupils behave well and are proud advocates for the Northfield Manor community.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff receive regular training and updates, which ensures that safeguarding remains a key priority. Leaders check on the effectiveness of this training, making sure that staff understand their responsibilities to keep pupils safe. Staff use the school's well-established systems to communicate any concerns that they may have about a pupil to leaders. Leaders then follow up these concerns quickly to make sure that pupils receive the right support where needed.

Pupils feel safe and confident at school. They are well educated about ways to keep themselves safe. They benefit from visitors, such as firefighters and the NSPCC, to help them understand how to keep themselves safe. Staff universally feel that pupils are safe. Parents agree with this and feel that their children are well cared for at school.

Inspection findings

- The trustees have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Their strategic involvement, such as in your appointment, responds well to the ongoing needs of the school. The structure of governance at the school has recently been changed to enable more focus on children, community and culture ('the three Cs') at a local level. The skills of those responsible for local governance have been enhanced through working with other governors from across the trust.
- You have made strategic changes to the leadership team within the school, some of which are not yet in place. Leaders new to their roles have rapidly identified where the most pressing improvements need to be made. They have developed strategic plans which set out precisely what needs to be done to address the weaknesses that remain within the school. However, most leaders are new to their posts, and some action plans are yet to be implemented. Therefore, it is too early to see the impact of their actions.
- The new leader of English has a clear overview of the strengths and weaknesses in reading across the school. A new approach to the teaching of reading was introduced this year and the quality of teaching of reading is becoming more consistent and more effective. Pupils say that reading is now much more 'fun' and they appreciate the wider range of reading books that they can choose from. Reading for pleasure remains a key focus and leaders have planned the curriculum to include opportunities for pupils to read in all subjects.

- While the approach to the teaching of reading is now consistent across the school, there remains some variability in the quality of teaching. In addition, many of the plans to improve reading have only recently been developed and are not yet embedded across the school. Leaders recognise that, due to the lack of detailed monitoring, pupils who have fallen behind in their reading have not been identified quickly enough. These pupils have not achieved as well as they should. This issue has been addressed and leaders now track pupils' progress in great detail. Current pupils are starting to make better progress because of the improved teaching and monitoring.
- The new leader of phonics will take up the role in September 2018. Clear plans are already in place to improve the quality of teaching in this area. Previously, teachers did not check what pupils, including children in the early years, did. They did not use pupils' prior learning to plan effectively to meet their learning needs. Leaders also recognised that the previous organisation of phonics teaching did not help pupils make enough progress in their learning. Leaders have addressed these issues and teaching is now improving. However, teachers do not match pupils' reading books to their phonics abilities. This does not help children in the early years and pupils in key stage 1 to make the progress that they should in reading and in learning about phonics.
- During this year, leaders have identified barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils more accurately. Historically, some barriers to learning were incorrectly identified as special educational needs. Leaders ensure that interventions are in place for pupils whose performance is of concern. However, interventions are not focused specifically on the barriers that individual disadvantaged pupils face. The school's culture to address the needs of individual pupils is a strength, but currently fails to consider the specific and individual needs of disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders collect regularly information about how well disadvantaged pupils are achieving. However, leaders' comparisons of disadvantaged pupils' performance to other pupils in the school and other pupils nationally leads to an overly positive evaluation of the impact of leaders' actions. During their time in the school, the difference in attainment and progress between disadvantaged pupils and their peers decreases, but too slowly for them to catch up with their peers by the end of Year 6.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the newly formed leadership team continues to build on the recent improvements already made
- the quality of teaching in reading across the school is further improved to enable pupils to make strong progress

- the quality of teaching in phonics is further developed in the early years and key stage 1, and that reading books are closely matched to children's and pupils' phonics abilities
- disadvantaged pupils receive more effective support which is closely matched to their specific needs to help them make more rapid progress.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rob Hackfath
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you and other staff, including those responsible for safeguarding. An inspector spoke with the chair of the academy trust board by telephone. Inspectors visited lessons and spoke to pupils about their work and looked at work in their books. Inspectors evaluated a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, development plans and records about pupils' attendance and outcomes. Inspectors also listened to pupils read and spoke to them informally during breaktime. Inspectors took the views of school staff into account through 26 responses to an inspection questionnaire. The views of parents were considered through 40 responses to Parent View and informal conversations at the start of the day.