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Miss Karen Hooker
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Hooker

Short inspection of Downside Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 January 2019 with Katherine Douglas, Ofsted Inspector, 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 May 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection.

You and your senior leaders provide clear and effective leadership to staff and pupils. You all know the school well and you acknowledge its successes. However, you focus your attention closely on what you all need to do next to ensure that pupils are even more successful, both in and out of the classroom. You and your leaders take advantage of the benefits of being a very large primary school. Pupils have access to specialist teachers, you provide a wide range of support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and you ensure that pupils can participate in many extra-curricular activities. However, you all ensure that no pupils 'get lost', because staff know and care for pupils well.

Pupils behave very well and they have excellent attitudes to learning. They are friendly, welcoming and very proud of their school. Pupils celebrate the school's diversity, and they have a clear understanding of each other's backgrounds, beliefs and cultures. One pupil commented: 'This school doesn't judge a person by how they look or how they sound. You have to respect people equally.' Staff who responded to the Ofsted staff survey are proud to work at the school and they agree that it is well led and managed. Although only a very small proportion of parents and carers responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, the school's annual parents' questionnaire shows very high levels of satisfaction from many parents.

Your leaders are accurate in their assessment of the school's overall effectiveness and its strengths and weaknesses. Priorities for improvement are appropriate and your leaders know what is expected of them. Consequently, the school has continued to improve since the previous inspection. Pupils' key stage 2 attainment across reading, writing and mathematics has improved over the past three years and is now above the national average. Progress in key stage 2 mathematics has been consistently strong for a number of years, while progress in writing has improved and is now above the national average. Although pupils' progress in reading is still less consistent, it improved substantially in 2018. The quality of pupils' handwriting, an area for improvement at the previous inspection, is also much improved.

Governors provide you with support and offer robust accountability. They know the school well, are passionate about its role within the community and are clear about what leaders need to do to improve it further. Governors support the school's development through their contributions at full governing body meetings, their meetings with individual school leaders and their regular school visits.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

You and your leaders undertake all appropriate checks on staff, which a nominated member of the governing body scrutinises on a regular basis. Your staff are well trained; they know how to identify any signs that pupils are at risk and what actions to take should they have any concerns. Your staff understand the school's safeguarding systems; they say that safeguarding is a part of the school's culture. Safeguarding records are well kept, and any child protection referrals are monitored closely. Governors understand their safeguarding duties and are effective in carrying them out.

Pupils said that they are safe at school and that, on the rare occasions it happens, bullying is dealt with swiftly and effectively. They said that they are well looked after and that they are confident about approaching staff if they have any concerns. One pupil, reflecting the views of many, stated: 'Everyone feels safe and welcome here.' Pupils talked positively about how they are taught to stay safe through lessons and assemblies that cover topics such as bullying, road safety and staying safe online.

Inspection findings

- I pursued several lines of enquiry to ascertain whether the school continues to be good. My first considered how effectively leaders are ensuring that current pupils make strong progress in their reading.
- You and your leaders have identified the reasons why pupils' progress in reading has been slower than in writing and mathematics. These included the use of texts in lessons that were not always challenging enough and the need for

teachers to have higher expectations of pupils' vocabulary. Teachers have received a range of additional training and leaders now provide them with high-quality teaching resources and planning documents. In addition, pupils now work in their own reading workbooks to raise the subject's profile, both with pupils and teachers alike. New strategies have been introduced to improve the quality of pupils' reading. For example, pupils now spend longer practising specific reading skills, such as comprehension and analysis.

- Pupils' progress in reading at the end of key stage 2 improved substantially in 2018 and the overall progress of pupils currently in the school also continues to improve. This is because teachers now have much higher expectations of what pupils can achieve and they are much more confident teaching pupils how to become fluent and analytical readers. Teachers question pupils well. They challenge them to explain their ideas and to support their views with accurately selected evidence. Pupils enjoy their reading lessons and they can explain what it means to be a good reader. However, some pupils still require additional support from their teachers because they struggle to understand fully what they need to do when answering certain types of question.
- My second line of enquiry was about how successfully you and your leaders are improving the quality of teaching so that it supports the progress of the most able pupils in key stage 2. You have added to the number of leaders with responsibility for improving the quality of teaching and you provide staff with training on key areas to support the most able pupils' progress. These include high-level questioning, mathematical reasoning and developing pupils' writing fluency. Teachers provide additional support for the most able pupils in areas where there are gaps in their knowledge. A staff 'steering group' has been established to develop new and effective ways to challenge the most able pupils in lessons.
- Many of your leaders' actions to support the progress of the most able pupils are relatively new and their impact is mixed. Most-able pupils make strong progress when teachers devise activities that are closely matched to their prior learning. This is evident in mathematics, where teachers use their strong subject knowledge to question pupils very effectively. On such occasions, pupils work enthusiastically and are keen to complete activities so that they can move quickly on to the next one. However, there are examples, especially in pupils' writing, where pupils' starting points are not considered as closely by teachers. As a consequence, some pupils are challenged less and they make slower progress.
- Finally, I checked the extent to which your leaders ensure that pupils attend school regularly. Leaders are rigorous in their monitoring of attendance and they work closely with pupils and their families, offering support when required. In addition, following a recent review of the school's approaches to attendance, you have plans to increase expectations of pupils, and to offer parents additional guidance and support in relation to attendance issues.
- As a result of your leaders' actions, the proportion of pupils who are absent or persistently absent from school has reduced this year and is currently in line with the national average. However, these improvements need to be maintained over a longer period. The absence and persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils and

those with SEND are still too high. This is because leaders' actions have been less successful in reducing the absence of these groups of pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to improve the progress of the most able pupils, especially in writing, by making sure that all teachers take sufficient account of pupils' starting points when planning learning activities
- they continue to reduce rates of absence and persistent absence, especially for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND.

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

Yours sincerely

Daniel Gee
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, other school leaders and staff, governors and two groups of pupils. We met with a representative from the local authority and visited a range of classes to observe teaching, to look at pupils' books and to see them at work. We scrutinised the school's evaluation of its own effectiveness, its development plan and other documentation, including the record of pre-employment checks and child protection records. We considered the 13 responses from parents to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, alongside the five free-text responses. We also reviewed the 53 staff responses to the Ofsted staff survey.