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Mrs Connie White
Executive Headteacher
Sundon Lower School
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Dear Mrs White

Short inspection of Sundon Lower School

Following my visit to the school on 30 October 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 February 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since taking on your role in September 2017, you have set out a clear vision for the school that has been welcomed by staff, pupils, parents, carers and trustees alike. Working closely with the deputy headteacher, you have quickly identified the school's strengths and what still needs to improve. You have brought about change demonstrably but sensitively, ensuring that all sections of the school community work together harmoniously for the benefit of the children.

The school is an attractive learning environment, where pupils' achievements are celebrated. Classrooms are colourful and stimulating. In the early years, resources are accessible to children. All outdoor spaces are well used and reflect the school's increasing focus on creating memorable learning experiences. For example, the 'outdoor classroom' is a sheltered space where pupils can engage in 'forest school' activities. The school celebrates the creative arts through singing with other schools and using specialist teachers to teach art and design and music.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their good attendance. They say, 'Everybody gets to know each other.' They welcome the friendly ethos and being able to make friends with older and younger children. They have very positive attitudes to learning. In class, they are keen to take a full part in activities and work hard. They know the school's values very well and can explain what it means to be

responsible or to show respect. Staff reinforce these values through the 'value of the month' and in assemblies. Pupils have a strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness, respecting those who are different and deepening in their knowledge of faiths and cultures. For example, pupils took a 'faith tour' in Bedford that included visits on the same day to a church, a gurdwara and a mosque.

The school benefits from its close partnership with the other school in the trust because they share some key staff and resources. Pupils make new friends when they go on residential visits together. Staff undertake joint training, sharing good practice and exchanging ideas. Trustees know the school well and visit regularly to see how it is tackling priorities. They set five-year plans that enable them to think ahead and carry out improvements to the site in a measured way. For example, the playground was recently resurfaced. Trustees have taken full advantage of the autonomy that being part of a trust brings the school. They ensure that money is well spent and that additional funds are used wisely. They hold leaders to account, for example by asking why outcomes dipped in writing last year.

Leaders were asked to give children in the early years 'a zest for learning' at the last inspection, which you have achieved. Children make a strong start. Even though some of them arrive needing support with speech and language, they settle quickly and soon acquire a range of skills. Parents stated how pleased they were with the progress their children are making. Children are given purposeful activities that stir their curiosity and have plenty of opportunities to practise their early reading, writing and numeracy skills. They enjoyed learning about the Gunpowder Plot and making firework pictures using glitter. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development has been above average for the past two years.

With small cohorts of pupils, outcomes do fluctuate, but pupils generally make strong progress from their starting points and are well prepared for middle school. Pupils did particularly well in reading at the end of key stage 1 in 2018.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is taken very seriously by all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, who are well trained. They are familiar with the 'Prevent' duty strategy to combat extremism and radicalisation and with all aspects of child protection. Staff follow procedures meticulously when concerns arise. They keep very clear records. You work closely with outside agencies, such as social services. You know the kinds of risks children run and you do all you can to help them stay safe. This includes keeping safe on the internet.

Pupils say they feel safe in school. They enjoy close relationships with adults and know who to turn to with any worries.

Inspection findings

- In order to make sure that the school remains good, I identified a number of key lines of enquiry that we agreed at our initial meeting. Firstly, we considered how

leaders have improved progress and attainment in writing, following some disappointing outcomes in 2018, especially in Year 4.

- Leaders investigated ways writing could improve and adopted a structured approach to teaching complex sentences. This helped to increase pupils' confidence. Boys' writing was not as strong as that of girls, so teachers chose topics that would appeal to boys, such as the First World War. In Years 1 and 2, teachers inspired pupils with high-quality texts to motivate them to write well. They aimed to increase pupils' vocabulary and to use role-play and drama to help them use it.
- This term, pupils are making stronger progress in writing. Many more are working at the expected standard for their age. In Year 4, one pupil wrote: 'Autumn is the time of year to look out of your window and see the majestic colour of leaves gently falling to the ground.' However, although increasing, the proportions of pupils working above expectations for their age in writing are not high enough.
- Next, we considered how well the curriculum enables pupils to achieve their potential in Years 3 and 4. Aspects of the curriculum formed an area for improvement at the previous inspection.
- You have undertaken a detailed review of the curriculum. You have chosen topics that pupils find relevant and have helped to shape. For example, pupils in Year 4 were formulating questions they wanted to investigate relating to the First World War, including 'Why is it called the First World War?' You have built flexibility into the curriculum. For instance, when pupils researched the suffragette leader Emmeline Pankhurst, they moved on to consider the wider role of women in society.
- Living-history days, where pupils take on the costumes and roles of people from the past, help to bring learning alive. Trips to places of interest, such as the British Museum, bring them face to face with priceless historic artefacts. These memorable experiences inspire pupils to write at greater depth and with more authority as they recall what they have discovered. This renewed focus on writing across the curriculum is relatively new and so the full impact is not yet evident.
- Finally, we considered how well the most able pupils are challenged. In the past, some of these pupils have not made the progress they should.
- Leaders now identify early on those pupils capable of working above age-related expectations and keep a careful eye on their progress. You ensure that teachers plan activities that challenge these pupils and really make them think. This often involves them doing different work from the other pupils, rather than more of the same or something added on afterwards. For example, in mathematics, the most able Year 4 pupils were solving complex problems involving money. They had to record their working out so that it was clear how they had reasoned the solution.
- In reading and mathematics, the proportions of pupils working above age-related expectations are increasing strongly. In some year groups, this is approaching half the pupils.
- At times, particularly in subjects other than English and mathematics, the most able pupils are given work that does not challenge them. This sometimes involves

cutting and sticking, or completing undemanding worksheets, when they could be recording their knowledge in more interesting and demanding ways.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the proportion of pupils working above the level expected for their age in writing rises so that they fulfil their potential
- the most able pupils consistently tackle work that challenges them and gives them choices about how to record their learning in subjects other than English and mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, 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

Nick Butt
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other school leaders, two trustees, including the chair, and pupils. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. We visited all classrooms more than once. I examined a range of documents, policies and assessment information. I considered five free-text responses from parents to Ofsted's questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke to parents in the playground before school. I took into account the views of 10 members of staff and 20 pupils who completed Ofsted questionnaires.