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Mrs Clare Cunnington
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Dear Mrs Cunnington

Short inspection of Loudwater Combined School

Following my visit to the school on 10 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school, and has implemented several improvements since the last inspection.

Together with governors and staff, you are very ambitious for the pupils in your care and passionate about improving the quality of provision at Loudwater. You provide energy, vision and inspirational leadership, which are recognised and highly valued by pupils, staff, parents and carers and the local authority. As one parent commented:

'The leadership by Mrs Cunnington is absolutely fantastic, she knows all the children personally and is a huge asset to the school. She is strong, very well organised and a pleasure to listen to when she stands and speaks at the school events.'

Loudwater is a small school which offers a particularly nurturing and inclusive community atmosphere. Recently, you commissioned an artist to work with all year groups to develop a high-quality street-art display of the school's values at the entrance to the school. Shared learning experiences like this have promoted a sense of teamwork and pride in the school. They have been used well to engage pupils and complement the already well-embedded and very effective praise and rewards system. From the Reception Year onwards, the habits of good learning are established through your school's high expectations, clear routines and the shared language of skills development. Consequently, there is an aspirational culture. Pupils

are articulate and confident and display very positive attitudes to their learning, to their school and to each other. They apply themselves diligently to the tasks they are given and take pride in making their work the best it can be. Detailed planning and dedicated work by staff ensure that the school offers a broad and rich curriculum. Pupils and parents particularly value the wide range of sporting and artistic clubs, trips and enrichment activities on offer. As one parent commented:

'Loudwater Combined School has offered my daughter extra-curricular activities and experiences where she has developed singing, public-speaking and performance skills I never knew she had!'

During your last inspection, the inspectors recognised the many strengths of your school, including: your strong leadership and vision; the school's effective assessment and monitoring systems; the impact of the use of pupil premium funding on the progress made by disadvantaged pupils; and the strength of the governing body. These continue to be key strengths of the school. The inspectors also identified a need to share outstanding practice and planning to enrich learning and to ensure that all teachers have consistently high expectations. Leaders and governors have responded well to these areas identified for improvement. You have worked to share teachers' planning, resources and training opportunities across your school and to develop useful partnerships with other schools. These have brought about improvements to the quality of teaching and moderation of pupils' work. In addition, you and other leaders check the quality of teaching regularly and have provided teachers with appropriate resources and training. These have enabled teachers to ensure that pupils make strong progress in English and mathematics.

Governors are a highly dedicated and professional team with a detailed, in-depth understanding of the school. Regular visits to the school and access to accurate tracking and assessment information, together with your detailed headteacher reports, keep governors well informed of the progress that the school is making. Your school self-evaluation and improvement planning are particularly thorough, have clear targets and are appropriately focused. You have identified the correct priorities for further improvement and are taking the right actions to achieve them. Following a dip in the attendance of some groups of pupils, you have taken a wide range of actions to address this, and attendance has improved significantly as a result. You have prioritised raising standards in writing and are aware that you need to ensure greater consistency of challenge for the most able pupils. While sharing curriculum planning and assessments in English and mathematics has brought about improvements, there is more to do to ensure that pupils receive consistently high levels of challenge in science and the wider curriculum.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that the school has robust safeguarding arrangements and that there are well-understood systems in place to manage safeguarding requirements. There is a culture of vigilance at the school, and records are carefully maintained and detailed. Leaders ensure that staff have appropriate and up-to-date training so

that they can spot and deal with any problems quickly. You are proactive, liaising with external agencies, and challenging where necessary, to ensure that timely and appropriate support is sourced for vulnerable pupils. Governors are very knowledgeable about safeguarding and ensure that this aspect of the staff's work is given a high priority and meets current requirements. The school's website contains useful information for parents, including much that relates to safeguarding and the promotion of e-safety.

Overall, pupils' attendance is in line with the national average and is improving. You recognise that some groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, had poor attendance rates in the past. The school has worked closely with parents and outside agencies to support improvements.

Bullying and discrimination are rare. Pupils report that they know how to keep themselves safe, including when on the internet. Pupils know who to go to should they have any concerns, and trust staff to resolve them. All staff and parents agree. One of the parents told me that 'the staff go above and beyond in supporting pupils', while another praised the support that her child had received and how well the school understands the family's needs.

Inspection findings

- During this visit, as well as evaluating safeguarding arrangements, I focused on specific aspects of the school's provision, including: the progress pupils make in Reception and Year 1; whether the dip in writing outcomes at key stages 1 and 2 in 2016 is indicative of current pupils' progress in writing; the quality of learning in the wider curriculum; and how effectively the school meets the needs of specific groups, including the most able pupils, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Working with the local authority, leaders reorganised and improved the quality of provision in the Reception class. As a result, the indoor and outdoor learning environments now offer an improved range of more stimulating learning opportunities. Children gain confidence from their good relationships with staff and collaborative play with others in their class. They make good progress and develop communication, literacy and mathematical skills that prepare them well for key stage 1. Leaders agree that more effective use of the outdoor learning environment would support even better skills development.
- In the past, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 has been in line with national figures, and nearly all pupils have achieved the expected standard by the end of Year 2. Leaders ensure that high-quality teaching of phonics underpins the strong progress that current pupils make in their reading skills and helps to foster a love of reading.
- In 2016, the proportions of pupils achieving the standards expected for their age in reading and mathematics at the end of Year 2 were average, but writing attainment was low. You have worked hard to address this. In 2017, Year 2

outcomes improved, with the proportions of pupils attaining the expected standard in reading and mathematics being above the national average and standards in writing in line with the national average. The proportion of those working at a greater depth of understanding was still slightly below national figures.

- Similarly, in 2016, progress in writing by the end of key stage 2 was below national figures, while reading and mathematics outcomes were strong. Leaders wasted no time in addressing this issue and 2017 outcomes indicate that key stage 2 pupils made progress in reading, writing and mathematics in line with national averages. This focus on improving writing continues, and current cohorts are making even stronger progress. Improved planning and assessment, together with training for staff, have resulted in a clear focus on improving standards in writing across the school. Pupils' work in books and displays demonstrates that teachers have routinely high expectations of pupils' writing. In most classes, pupils respond well to teachers' feedback to refine, edit and improve their work.
- You have been proactive in developing opportunities to work with a local network of schools to share ideas and moderate pupils' work. Consequently, leaders of English and mathematics work well with teachers to share ideas and ensure consistency of approach across the different year groups. Regular assessment and monitoring allow leaders to track the progress of individual pupils and to challenge staff. Leaders and governors are rightly focused on ensuring that a greater proportion of pupils achieve the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2.
- Overall attendance is regularly in line with national figures, and leaders' actions have improved the attendance of groups over recent years. In 2016, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities was well below that of their peers. Analysis of school records showed that this was due to specific issues faced by this particular cohort. Newsletters and awards are used to good effect to actively promote the value of good attendance. You and the school's parent support adviser ensure that appropriate and timely action is taken to support vulnerable pupils and their families when the need arises. As a result, the attendance of these groups improved significantly last year.
- Leaders and governors ensure that very good use is made of additional funding. Detailed monitoring of the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities ensures that timely and accurate support is provided to meet their needs. Consequently, these groups make good progress, and parents particularly value the support that staff provide.
- The school offers a broad and rich curriculum. The wide assortment of sporting tournaments, clubs, trips and visits in each year group are highly valued by pupils and parents. However, pupils' books show that not all teachers' expectations are as consistently high in science and the wider curriculum as they are in English and mathematics. Pupils, particularly the most able pupils, are not set sufficiently challenging tasks to ensure that they apply their writing skills and deeper thinking in science and the humanities. Consequently, progress is not yet as strong across the broader curriculum as it is in reading, writing and mathematics.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- progress in writing continues to improve across the school
- improved levels of challenge enable a higher proportion of the most able pupils to achieve the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics
- the quality of pupils' work and the depth of learning in science and the wider curriculum are consistently as good as the best in the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Matthew Newberry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, other school leaders and four members of the governing body. I also held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. Together with you, I visited all of the classes to look at teaching and learning. I looked at a range of pupils' work in their exercise books. I observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime and around the school, and had a meeting with a small group of pupils. I took into account 45 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as speaking to a number of parents at the beginning of the day. In addition, I considered the views expressed by two parents who contacted Ofsted by email on the day of the inspection. I took into account the views expressed in the staff survey and 40 responses to the pupil survey. I reviewed a range of documents, including reports to governors, minutes of meetings, pupils' progress information and safeguarding policies, procedures and checks.