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27 February 2018

Mrs Margaret Thomas
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Thomas

Short inspection of Mersey Park Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 14 February 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

This is a welcoming school. Pupils are polite and friendly. Behaviour in lessons and around school continues to be a strength. Pupils I spoke to said that they enjoyed school. Older pupils told me about the opportunities that they have to become peer mentors, school councillors, anti-bullying ambassadors or 'mini police officers'. You value the contribution that pupils make to the school. Pupils, including members of the school council, recently carried out an 'inspection' of the school. They interviewed leaders and made recommendations to you. Pupils found that the system for queuing for lunches was not working. As a result of the inspection findings, you worked with the pupils to address the issue.

You have a thorough understanding of the needs of the pupils who attend your school and use a range of strategies to engage and support both them and their families. For example, to engage pupils – challenging them to reason and think deeply – you use philosophical questioning strategies throughout the school. The curriculum is rich. For example, pupils were enthusiastic in recounting their recent whole-school trip to Chester Zoo. The quality of pupils' work around the school is of

a very high standard, particularly their art and design and technology work. Pupils sing with enthusiasm in assembly. Work that pupils produce across all subjects is of a high quality and is celebrated well throughout the school.

Parents and carers hold the school in high regard. Those who responded to the Ofsted surveys were overwhelmingly complimentary about the standards of care. One comment typical of many parents was: 'I feel very proud of my children attending Mersey Park. The school has always exceeded my expectations.' Parents that I spoke to on the playground were unanimous in stating that they could not fault this school.

Governors have a very strong overview of the school and are realistic in their evaluation of the school's effectiveness. They have a firm understanding of the school's strengths and the areas to be developed. Newer members of the governing body are supported well by more experienced governors. Governors are aware of their statutory responsibilities and carry them out effectively.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to improve teaching so that pupils' achievement would increase. You and the leadership team make regular checks on the quality of teaching. Teaching has improved and, since the previous inspection, pupils' outcomes have improved significantly. By the end of key stage 2, the majority of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make strong progress in writing and mathematics. Progress in reading by the end of key stage 2 is better than the national average. A significant proportion of pupils who attain the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 1 go on to achieve the higher standards at the end of key stage 2. Outcomes for pupils at the end of key stage 1 have also increased. Pupils' outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics have been higher than the national average, with increased proportions achieving the higher standards over recent years.

Your self-evaluation of the school is accurate and your records of monitoring are detailed. Findings from monitoring activities are shared with the staff and you continually adapt the school development plan to ensure that pupils make the best possible progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. All checks have been made on the suitability of staff to work with children. All staff have received safeguarding basic awareness training and 'Prevent' duty training. Several members of staff and governors are trained in safer recruitment.

You make timely referrals to children's social care. Records of this work are detailed and demonstrate your resolve in ensuring that pupils are safe at all times. You work in close partnership with Merseyside Police and a range of children's charities, one of which recently provided a representative to lead an assembly on personal safety. E-safety is actively promoted through the curriculum. You provide opportunities for

parents, pupils and staff to access up-to-date training. For example, the staff have recently completed training related to 'sexting', due to the rise in the issue nationally.

Inspection findings

- As part of this inspection, I looked at what you were doing to raise standards in reading. By the end of key stage 2, pupils make better progress in writing and mathematics than they do in reading. You and I visited classes across key stage 2. We spoke to pupils and looked at examples of work in English books and books from other subjects. You know that you need to focus on improving pupils' vocabulary. You do this well through a consistent approach to the teaching of new vocabulary across the school. In the classes that we visited, we observed pupils answer challenging and probing questions. The work on display and the work in pupils' topic books demonstrate that they receive a broad and rich curriculum. Non-negotiable rules are in place for all classes for reading and writing expectations. Your own assessment data shows that pupils' progress in reading has improved this year, with an increased proportion of pupils now working at age-related expectations. Assessment information for all year groups shows that standards in reading are now on a par with those achieved in writing and mathematics. Together, we agreed that you should build upon your effective actions, ensuring that reading outcomes at the end of key stage 2 are in line with the outcomes achieved in writing and mathematics.
- The next area that I looked at related to the quality of provision in the early years. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year has remained stubbornly below the national average for a number of years. Your assessment information shows that half of the children entering the Reception class this year had skills below what are typical for their age, and a quarter were lower than this, especially in communication and personal skills. However, leaders are not complacent and have ensured that the early years is an exciting and well-resourced environment. Children engage in learning activities with high levels of concentration. Adult intervention is purposeful and children work with independence. Role-play areas help the children develop their communication and social skills. Children have access to a wide range of creative and challenging activities targeting specific skills. One child told me the bag that she was making was for Little Red Riding Hood to carry food for her granny. The outdoor environment is easily accessible and used effectively to extend learning. The introduction of the key vocabulary that was observed in key stage 2 starts in the early years. Language development is a key focus for the school. This consistent approach to language development is showing improvements. Daily guided reading sessions help children acquire new language quickly. Recent assessments show that children make good progress in all areas. Children make the most progress in number, shape, space and measures, reading and writing. You introduce philosophical questioning strategies at this stage because it helps you address the weaknesses in communication. For example, children were asked to consider 'Should Little Red Riding Hood have spoken to the wolf?'

- The final area that I looked at during the inspection related to attendance. Since the previous inspection, published data shows that the attendance of pupils has decreased and that rates of persistent absence have risen. You have been active in your promotion of attendance. Pupils are highly competitive and strive to be placed top in the school's attendance figures. You make first-response telephone calls when pupils are absent. The home-school liaison officer monitors absences and works closely with vulnerable families. The impact of these actions is clear in current whole-school attendance figures, which demonstrate an improved picture compared to the same time last year for all groups of pupils. Rates of persistent absence have fallen slightly but remain above the national average. In 2016, you were unable to tackle the increased number of absences during term time. This year, you have tackled this weaker aspect with a firmer approach and now issue fixed-penalty notices for unauthorised absences. Half-termly letters are sent to families whose attendance is poor. Where attendance is persistently low, parents are invited to attend an attendance-panel meeting. During these meetings, senior leaders and the local authority education support worker draw up parental contracts to improve attendance. You and I agreed that this relentless work must be ongoing to further improve attendance and cut the high number of persistent absences.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they build upon the effective progress made in reading to ensure that pupils' outcomes at the end of key stage 2 are consistently in line with the strong outcomes achieved in mathematics and writing
- they continue the relentless efforts to further improve overall school attendance, with a particular focus on decreasing the high number of persistent absences.

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

Yours sincerely

John Donald
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

With you, I carried out visits to classes in all year groups. I scrutinised school documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and school development plan. I looked at assessment information and records of monitoring activities. I checked all records of safeguarding and staff recruitment. I met with a representative of the local authority. I met with the governing board. I looked at examples of pupils' work

and I heard pupils read both formally and informally. I evaluated 46 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. I considered 65 pupil survey responses and 38 staff survey responses. I considered seven free-text responses.