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7 March 2017

Cathy Gillespie  
Headteacher  
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Dear Ms Gillespie

### **Short inspection of Stewart Headlam Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 31 January 2017, 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 since the last inspection.

Your decision to restructure the leadership team to build further capacity has resulted in sustained improvements to teaching and pupils' outcomes. You have created a leadership team in which responsibilities are focused tightly around teaching and the curriculum. As a result, there is a clear link between the quality of provision and pupils' outcomes. This is evident in the way you have tackled pupils' writing skills, an area for improvement from the previous inspection. School leaders have approached this challenge effectively, opting to create opportunities for pupils to write across the whole breadth of the curriculum. This is having a positive impact on the progress that pupils make in their writing. End of year outcomes in 2016 show that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, made good progress in writing compared to the national average.

You have worked closely with middle leaders to develop their skills when monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning in their respective subjects. In response, school leaders display unwavering commitment to sustaining improvement and have the highest expectations of teachers. They monitor pupils' progress rigorously, enabling teachers to identify learning gaps and intervene at the earliest opportunity. Pupils therefore make good progress in all areas of the curriculum.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Scrutiny of safeguarding records reflects prompt and effective referrals made by staff at all levels. As the designated safeguarding lead, you routinely challenge external agencies to secure better outcomes for vulnerable pupils in your care. Each member of the senior leadership team takes responsibility over a safeguarding focus, making leadership of this area tight and effective. As a result, pupils are safe and well cared for.

Pupils feel safe at school. They say that if they have any concerns or worries they are able to express them during 'talk times'. This is a self-referral system where they access a learning mentor whom they can talk to. Pupils demonstrate understanding of how to keep themselves safe at school, at home or online.

## **Inspection findings**

- In our initial discussion, we identified reading as one of our key lines of enquiry. Assessment information and observations of learning confirm that the teaching of phonics remains a strength of the school. When I heard pupils read, they did so fluently, using their phonic knowledge competently to decode unfamiliar words. Older pupils talked enthusiastically about their books, displaying a genuine love for reading. School leaders have provided pupils with access to high-quality reading materials. By the end of year 6, most pupils make at least expected progress from their starting points.
- However, disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, do not make rapid enough progress to achieve greater depth in reading. Work in books shows that they are not stretched and challenged regularly enough to develop sophisticated reading skills. Pupils' reading records reflect limited opportunities for the development of their comprehension skills, which remain weak.
- The most recent Year 6 examination results show that the proportion of pupils achieving greater depth in mathematics is lower than national average. We agreed to look at this during the inspection and to evaluate the effectiveness of school leaders' actions to address this.
- Pupils' books show that the work of middle leaders to transform the teaching of mathematics across the school has paid off. Pupils now have varied and frequent opportunities to practise and consolidate their mathematical skills. As a result, they routinely deepen their knowledge.
- The most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, rise to the challenge of activities planned for them in mathematics, thereby achieving greater depth in their learning. Pupils demonstrate a love for this subject, and show enthusiasm when applying their mathematical skills. Teachers have eliminated pupils' fear of failure, encouraging them to have a go and learn from their 'mathematical mistakes', as pupils put it.
- I also looked at the achievement of boys in the early years, which was lower than girls in the past two school years. This was because very few boys achieved the

early learning goals in reading and writing. In response to this, you have retrained staff in the teaching of phonics. They now regularly create opportunities for children to apply their phonic knowledge in indoor and outdoor writing areas. Teachers plan learning based on the interests of children in the setting. This has engaged boys not only in writing but also in applying their reading skills across a wide range of independent learning activities. During this visit I observed a couple of boys trying to read animal names using their phonic knowledge, for example.

- Adults in the early years intervene effectively to consolidate and extend children's learning. For instance, adults work with groups of identified children to develop their phonic confidence, aiming for children who need to catch up with their peers in their reading. As a result, the most recent assessment information shows that the difference in the attainment of boys and girls has diminished considerably, in the areas of reading and writing.
- Finally, I focused on attendance and found out that it has been improving year on year. School leaders have a zero-tolerance approach to absence. There is an effective system of managing pupils' absence, from actions initiated by the school to local authority interventions. Where pupils' absences reflect wider issues, including medical needs or housing difficulties, the school works effectively with families and external agencies to ensure that barriers to attendance are addressed.
- School records show higher rates of absence for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Persistent absence is often linked to unauthorised extended absence. However, the school has taken robust action and absence rates are reducing year on year for these pupils.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils develop their comprehension skills further when engaging with texts
- the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, are stretched and challenged to achieve greater depth in reading.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for Tower Hamlets. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Edison David  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During this short inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteachers and middle leaders. I also considered responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I met with a group of pupils to discuss their experiences in lessons, the extent to which they feel safe, and their views on learning and behaviour. I held discussions with the local authority's representative. I met with three governors. I also considered documentation provided by the school and information posted on the school's website. I looked at recruitment records, the single central record and the analysis of pupils' attendance. Together, we visited classes to observe learning and I undertook an extensive scrutiny of the work produced by pupils in reading and mathematics. I looked at children's learning profiles in the early years. I listened to reading by pupils from across the ability range.

This inspection particularly focused on the following lines of enquiry:

- What actions have the school leaders taken to ensure that more pupils, including for those who need to catch up, make good progress and achieve higher standards in reading?
- What actions have school leaders taken to improve attainment and rates of progress of pupils, including advantaged and most disadvantaged pupils, in mathematics?
- What accounts for the difference in the performance of boys and girls in the early years? How well does the provision support children's reading, writing and mathematical development?
- How effectively do leaders address issues relating to pupils' attendance? What steps have they taken to reduce persistent absenteeism of specific pupil groups?