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Ms Lyndsey Wood  
Head of School  
The Oaks Community Infant School  
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Kent  
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Dear Ms Wood

### **Short inspection of The Oaks Community Infant School**

Following my visit to the school on 19 January 2016, 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 June 2011.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

At the time of the last inspection, the inspector recognised many strong qualities of the school. These included the good progress pupils made, particularly in reading and writing, good-quality teaching and well-planned, engaging learning activities. Other strengths included the high priority given to promoting safety and well-being and the positive relationships fostered throughout the school which contributed to outstanding behaviour. These continue to be strong features. Pupils achieve well, academically and socially, and leave the school well prepared for their next steps in education.

The inspector identified achievement in mathematics, particularly for most-able pupils, as an area for improvement. He recommended that pupils be given more opportunities to investigate and solve problems in mathematics and in science. The inspector reported that teachers' feedback to pupils was not precise enough to help pupils to improve their work. Leaders and staff have addressed these issues very effectively so that achievement in mathematics is above average by the time pupils move on to junior school. Mathematics activities are well planned. Adults intervene quickly to sort out any misunderstandings. They provide useful guidance and support and move the learning on. Pupils' science work shows that they have a wide range of opportunities to investigate 'curious questions' and think carefully about their findings.

There have been some difficult times over the past two years because of changes in staffing and a number of long-term absences, which caused instability in teaching and in leadership. Despite this, relationships remain positive, pupils are safe, behave well and continue to achieve above-average outcomes, particularly in reading and mathematics.

You have had a strong, positive impact on the school particularly since you became acting headteacher in September 2015 and then head of school in January 2016. There is a strong sense of purpose and direction, and staff are keen to play their part in bringing about further improvements. The responses to the staff questionnaire are overwhelmingly positive and staff are proud to be part of the school. You are well supported by other leaders, including the revitalised governing body, which also carries out its responsibilities enthusiastically and effectively. You and the other leaders have carried out a careful analysis and evaluation of the school and, as a result, the self-evaluation document is honest, detailed and links very well with sharply focused, practical improvement plans. You have identified that pupils' writing skills have not been quite as good as their reading and mathematics skills, and that disadvantaged pupils have not achieved as well as other pupils. Attendance has not been as high as it should be, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. These are all key priorities and the actions taken by the school are bringing about improvements.

You carry out regular visits to observe teaching and learning. The high quality of feedback and professional discussions which follow on from these visits are leading to further improvements. For example, the quality of teaching and learning in the early years classes has improved considerably. You have led some key changes, such as revitalising the curriculum to bring it in line with the new National Curriculum and to build on the interests of children. There has been a strong focus on making sure that the classrooms and corridor displays celebrate achievements and support learning. As a result, the school is vibrant and learning is engaging for staff and pupils. Attendance is improving and is currently above average.

Local authority colleagues played an important role in maintaining the quality of education and supporting the school, particularly through the difficult times. The school has recently joined a collaboration of four schools with an executive headteacher who has strategic leadership over the four schools. Already, the benefits of cross-school working and sharing good practice are having a positive impact on the education provided.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Almost all staff, parents and pupils say that pupils are very safe in school. The systems for ensuring pupils' health and safety are rigorous and effective. Policies have been reviewed this academic year and are up to date. The governors carry out regular checks and have highlighted aspects in policies where further guidance would be helpful. Staff follow the correct procedures and any concerns are immediately addressed. Training is up to date and ongoing to make sure that staff

are aware of the implications of the most recent guidance. Relationships are trusting and friendly between pupils, staff and parents. There are calm, well-ordered routines which help pupils feel secure and build confidence.

## **Inspection findings**

- You have promoted a strong culture of improvement, teamwork and ambition. Staff are motivated and positive about the recent changes in leadership and in the quality of provision. Governance has been strengthened and governors keep a very keen eye on whether improvement targets are being achieved.
- Staffing has stabilised and leadership is more effective, with year group leaders and other staff with responsibilities, such as for attendance, now functioning much more independently and making a real difference. Throughout the school, adults plan a good range of activities to capture children's interest and promote their language skills. Relationships and routines are calm and positive.
- In the early years, there is now a settled teaching team providing good-quality, well-planned experiences inside and out. During the visit, children in the Nursery were fascinated by ice and this prompted good speaking, listening and vocabulary development. In a Reception session, children enjoyed exploring the wooded area, finding sticks and imagining that these were not sticks but lightsabers or magic wands. In Reception classes, and in the Nursery unit, children engage enthusiastically in the different activities, and adults promote their learning through skilful questioning and prompting.
- The proportion of children who achieve the skills expected for their age at the end of Reception is usually well above average. This was not the case last year and the school is working hard to help a group of Year 1 pupils make up the lost ground. There is evidence that this is happening and they are catching up.
- There has been a very noticeable improvement in achievement in mathematics since the last inspection so that, by the end of Year 2, attainment is above average and significantly above average for most-able pupils.
- Pupils' books show that pupils have many opportunities to learn in depth and across different aspects of mathematics and science. Pupils have many opportunities to investigate and solve problems in mathematics and in science. During the visit, Year 1 pupils enjoyed practical activities which involved buying different items and recording the answers both in amount spent and coins used.
- You and the governors are paying particularly close attention to the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and the impact of additional government funding for this group. Recent changes in provision, such as employing teachers qualified to teach specific reading and mathematics catch-up programmes, are resulting in significant improvements. Your most recent checks on how well these pupils are achieving show that their attendance is improving and gaps are closing in reading, writing and mathematics. However, although more of this group are achieving the levels expected for

their ages, fewer than might be expected are doing better than this. It is important to make sure that expectations and aspirations are high enough for all of these pupils.

- Last year, pupils' achievement in writing was not as good as in reading and mathematics. There was a higher than usual number of pupils in this cohort with significant special needs in speech, language and communication and this skewed the outcomes but, nonetheless, writing is one of the school's main priorities for improvement. Teachers plan interesting ideas to spark discussion and in-depth learning in literacy. During the visit, pupils explored and identified the features of different comic strips, and discussed and wrote about their own superhero's characteristics. There were good opportunities for them to discuss ideas, and use and build on their knowledge of spelling, grammar and vocabulary, thus resulting in good-quality pieces of writing. However, although there are many opportunities for pupils to discuss their ideas enthusiastically, there are not so many planned opportunities where they have to listen and reflect on the ideas of other people.

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

Leaders and governors should:

- reduce further the gaps between the achievement and attendance of disadvantaged pupils and others
- increase the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who achieve above the skills expected for their ages
- raise attainment in writing so that it is more in line with reading and mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Kent local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sheena MacDonald  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, the executive headteacher, the acting deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher who also holds responsibility for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, a group of other leaders, two members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. We visited all of the teaching groups during the day to observe the quality of teaching and learning. We also looked at a sample of books, including some from disadvantaged pupils. I took

account of 55 staff questionnaires, 21 pupil questionnaires and the governors' own recent parent survey. I spoke to a number of parents at the start of the school day. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including information about teaching, pupils' achievement, staff training records, safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. I also looked at, and discussed with you, the evaluation of the school's effectiveness and the current improvement plans.