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Mrs Lisa Hayes  
Headteacher  
Highover Junior Mixed and Infant School  
Cambridge Road  
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Hertfordshire  
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Dear Mrs Hayes

### **Short inspection of Highover Junior Mixed and Infant School**

Following my visit to the school on 2 February 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 May 2011.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. This is a school where standards are high, pupils behave well and there is a constant focus on further improvement. Pupils achieve well at the end of Key Stage 2, both in terms of their attainment and the progress they make. This is the result of the persistence and determination of the school's leaders. It is clear that your personal mantra, 'No child left behind', drives your leadership of the school. Disadvantaged pupils achieve well overall as a result of your approach. Nevertheless, you are aware that there is still room for improvement, particularly in Key Stage 1 and at the higher levels.

The school has doubled in size since the last inspection and now has two classes in every year group other than in Years 5 and 6. A new block of classrooms has been built to accommodate the increase in pupil numbers. You and the governors managed this major project very well and did not allow standards to slip while work was being completed. The school is rightly very popular in the local area and there is currently a waiting list for places.

Although the school continues to be good, it has improved since the last inspection. You have addressed the recommendations from the last inspection very well. As a result of the actions you have taken, pupils' attainment in writing has been well above the national average for several years. The deputy head is a role model for other staff and it is clear that her coaching role is having a significant and continuing impact on raising the quality of teaching in the school.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They talk confidently about their 'interesting lessons' and the wide variety of experiences that are provided for them, such as learning to dance the samba during multicultural week. Relationships are very strong in the school and pupils comment that 'The teachers are really nice.'

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You and the school's governors have now ensured that safeguarding is effective and that statutory requirements are met. However, until very recently, safer recruitment practices were not robust enough. The school's approach to employing midday supervisory staff was insufficiently robust and did not reflect the rigour applied to the recruitment of teachers. You are very well aware of the seriousness of this issue. You took immediate and appropriate action, and the issue has now been rectified.

The school's single central record meets statutory requirements. You and other school leaders have a good level of knowledge and understanding of current safeguarding policy. You take your responsibilities for keeping children safe seriously and are not afraid to take prompt and decisive action when necessary. Records are thorough and are kept securely.

Pupils describe Highover as a 'very, very safe' school and parents agree. Pupils say that bullying is rare and they have confidence in staff to deal with any issues that may arise from time to time. Pupils have been taught to tell an adult if they are ever worried about anything and have also been introduced to 'Childline' as another source of help.

### **Inspection findings**

- You provide strong and highly effective leadership. You are deeply committed to providing pupils with the best possible quality of education. Your influence pervades the school and your personal contribution to the school's success is clear. You are ably supported by a very capable deputy headteacher and you complement one another well. You have very sensibly ensured that your deputy's main role is to use her strengths as a teacher to coach and mentor other teachers in the school. It is clear that this approach is paying dividends and the good quality of teaching in the school is continuing to rise.
- Leadership at Highover is very strong overall. The progress pupils make is monitored thoroughly and carefully, and swift action is taken to provide appropriate additional support when needed. The school's governors know the school well and have a clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Governors sensibly use evidence from external sources, such as visits from the local authority's adviser, to double-check the information you give them. They understand that their role is to challenge as well as support you and they achieve this balance well.
- Self-evaluation is thorough but it is too descriptive. The self-evaluation summary lists the school's very many strengths but does not act as a

diagnostic tool in terms of identifying its weaknesses. A more analytical approach is needed in order to sharpen the evaluation of both the school's strengths and its weaknesses.

- The school cannot be judged to be outstanding at this time because its leaders and governors 'took their eye off the ball' with regard to the employment of midday supervisory staff. Although there is no suggestion that pupils were put at risk, the school's leaders did not ensure that the same rigorous approach to seeking references was applied to midday supervisory staff as to other staff in the school. Safer recruitment processes were not monitored stringently enough.
- Pupils achieve very well at Highover because they are taught well and expectations are high. Children make a very good start in early years and the proportion who reach a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year is above the national average. This good progress continues into Year 1 and the proportion of pupils who reach the expected level in the phonics screening check at the end of the year is consistently above the national average. For four of the last five years attainment at the end of both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 has been well above the national average.
- Results fell at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2015 although attainment remained above the national average. You and the school's leaders are fully aware of the reasons for this fall and it is clear that this is reflective of the cohort rather than of a drop in standards. The work in current pupils' exercise books is of a good quality and demonstrates the good progress pupils are making, reflecting teachers' consistently high expectations of them.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieve very well at Highover and catch up with other pupils by the time they leave the school. You and other school leaders monitor the progress of all pupils very closely and put appropriate support in place when you identify that pupils need additional help. Disadvantaged pupils do not yet attain as highly as others in the early years and Key Stage 1, and fewer reach the higher levels at the end of Key Stage 2 than others in the school. Disadvantaged pupils are targeted for additional support on a daily basis but you are aware that more work is needed to challenge the most-able pupils in this group.
- Pupils attend school regularly and on time. Attendance is high because the school rightly takes a very firm approach to absence. You and other leaders involve yourselves directly in tackling absence, firmly and immediately. It is clear that this approach has a very strong impact on improving the attendance of individual pupils and groups of pupils.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they check regularly that the same rigorous safer recruitment practices are adopted in the employment of all staff, regardless of role
- evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is appropriately self-critical, focusing on analysis rather than description
- outcomes for disadvantaged pupils continue to improve, particularly in Key Stage 1 and at the higher levels.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Hertfordshire County Council, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, and a group of governors. The inspector met with a group of pupils from Key Stages 1 and 2 and spoke with other pupils throughout the day. The inspector spoke with parents in the playground and the responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, were taken into account. The inspector observed teaching and learning in lessons jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, looked at pupils' books, and scrutinised a range of school documents.