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Ms L Fishleigh
Abbots Hall Primary School
Abbotts Drive
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Dear Ms Fishleigh

Short inspection of Abbots Hall Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 March 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 converted to an academy in May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education at the school. Since your appointment in June 2014, you have worked with other school leaders to develop a culture in which teachers and other adults who support learning are constantly striving to improve. The positive attitudes displayed by staff are complemented by the school's caring and nurturing ethos, which ensures that pupils are well looked after and well cared for. Pupils enjoy school, have good attitudes towards learning, and make good progress.

You have successfully managed many changes at the school over the past 18 months. Several new teachers have been appointed, including a new early years leader and a new subject leader for mathematics. The new appointments have helped to re-energise the staff team, and have contributed to the significant improvements in teaching, learning and assessment. Staff are fully supportive of your leadership and appreciate the improvements that you have made since your appointment. As one member of staff stated in the questionnaire, 'We are encouraged to learn from each other and work together for the good of the school and its pupils.'

As a result of your work:

- pupils enjoy school, attend regularly and develop good attitudes to learning
- the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is typically good
- pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics

- disadvantaged pupils are well supported, make good progress and achieve well.

Along with other senior leaders, including governors, you are constantly looking at ways to improve the school further. You enjoy a positive relationship with the local authority, through which you have accessed highly effective advice, support and training. You recognise the benefits of sharing expertise and have developed good links with other schools in the locality.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture in the school of keeping pupils safe and secure. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that all statutory requirements relating to safeguarding are met. All members of staff are rigorous in implementing the agreed safeguarding policies and procedures. Any concerns are followed up assiduously in order to ensure that pupils and their families receive the support that they need. Senior leaders ensure that appropriate checks are carried out when appointing new members of staff. Records are detailed and of high quality. Staff are fully aware of the government's 'Prevent' duty strategy and this is reflected in the school's recently developed extremism policy.

Inspection findings

- Improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the early years mean that children now make a very good start to school life at Abbots Hall. They make good progress in all areas of learning because teaching is good and staff provide a wide range of exciting activities to engage children's imagination during child-initiated play. The percentage of children who reached a good level of development in 2015 was above the national average and the vast majority of children were well prepared for the next stage of their education when they moved into Year 1.
- Reading is taught well. The teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) is effective. The percentage of pupils who reached the required standard in the phonics check in 2015 was above the national average. Early reading skills are developed well and help to ensure that most pupils are competent and confident readers by the end of Key Stage 1. Pupils make good progress across Key Stage 2. Pupils spoken to during this inspection demonstrated a love of reading and had a good knowledge of children's literature. In 2015, pupils' attainment in reading was significantly above the national average.
- The quality of writing across the school is good. Children get off to a solid start in the Reception class, where they are provided with regular opportunities to develop early writing skills. Across the school, pupils' successes in writing are celebrated in attractive displays of their work. Teachers mark the work that pupils produce in their English books carefully,

and provide helpful feedback to pupils about how they can improve. Attainment in writing was significantly above the national average in 2015.

- Over the past six months, the school has been focusing on improving the teaching of mathematics. This work has been extremely successful. The work seen in pupils' books showed that they are responding well to the new approaches to teaching and learning. Pupils are provided with regular opportunities to use and apply their computational skills across different areas of mathematics, such as geometry and statistics. They are making very good progress as a result.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieve well. The school ensures that additional funding is put to good use, providing both academic and pastoral support where needed. As a result, these pupils develop confidence and make good progress in their learning. The gap in attainment between these pupils and all pupils nationally narrowed in 2015.
- Throughout the school, pupils are taught to be kind to each other and respect different points of view. The school ensures that pupils are taught about British values and the principles that underpin democracy, such as tolerance, liberty and the rule of law. The impact of the school's values can be seen in the good relationships that exist between pupils and staff. Behaviour is extremely good and pupils are enthusiastic learners. Rates of attendance, which have been too low over the past two years, have improved considerably and are currently above the national average.
- The school's curriculum is well planned and provides pupils with a broad range of subjects to study. However, too often there is a lack of challenge in subjects outside of English and mathematics, and teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve is too low. Recent improvements have been made to the teaching of science but the work seen in subjects such as geography, history and art was of poor quality.
- Parents are generally supportive of the school. Although a few parents were negative in their responses on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Most parents rightly believe that the school is well led and managed, that pupils behave well and that teaching is good. A very large majority of the parents would recommend the school to a friend.
- The work of middle leaders is increasingly effective. This is reflected in the high standards being achieved in reading and writing, and the recent improvements in mathematics and the early years foundation stage. Middle leaders ensure that regular checks are made on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in their areas, and also help to ensure that appropriate support and training is provided for staff. However, the leadership of subjects in the wider curriculum is not as effective and this weakness has contributed to the lower quality of work seen in these subjects.

- Governance is highly effective. Governors visit the school often and are regularly involved in reviewing the quality of the school's work. They know about the relative strengths of teaching and learning across the school and understand the link between pay and performance. Governors ensure that all statutory duties are carried out, including those relating to safeguarding. Governors attend relevant training and provide good levels of challenge and support to school leaders. They share your ambition for the school to improve further.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- greater challenge is provided for all pupils in subjects such as science, geography, art and history
- regular and rigorous checks are made on the quality of teaching and learning in all curriculum areas.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Thurrock Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Tomkow

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection I met with you, the deputy headteacher and the subject leaders for English and mathematics. I also met with the chair of the governing body along with four other governors. I looked at work in pupils' books from across the school and visited each class with you to observe teaching. I scrutinised documents relating to the school's safeguarding and child protection policies and looked at the single central record. I looked at the school's current self-evaluation document and the latest school improvement plan. I also looked at information about pupils' attendance. I considered the views of the 36 parents who had responded to Parent View. I also analysed the 16 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.