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Mr R Cano
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Dear Mr Cano

Short inspection of Purwell Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 June 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 September 2010.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You have developed the school's capacity for improvement by strengthening senior leadership. Since the previous inspection, staff recruitment has been challenging. Over half the teaching staff have changed. Current English, mathematics and information and communication technology subject leaders have only been in place since September 2015. A number of new governors have been appointed including the chair of the governing body. Over time you have increased the number of teaching and learning support assistants, and employed a school family worker. The number of pupils has also increased in the school and there are no longer any mixed-age classes.

It is clear from my discussions with your staff, leadership team and governors that your desire to continue to improve the school is shared. During the previous inspection, it was identified that the school had some areas for improvement. Your tenacity to ensure that teaching is now consistently good or better, that staff provide the most able pupils with challenging tasks and that senior leaders effectively use assessment information has paid off. As one parent put it, 'I have seen my children stretched in their learning.' As a result of very effective assessment of pupils' work, teachers now plan interesting and stimulating learning that gives all pupils the

opportunity to challenge themselves – and they do, willingly, saying such things as, 'I am feeling quite confident with this topic but this will challenge me.' You know your pupils well. You keep meticulous records of their achievements and what they need to do to improve. You support teachers well in their work by providing timely and relevant opportunities for professional development.

You have increased the monitoring role of senior leaders. Assessment information is being used well and intelligently. The routine checking on pupils' progress by looking at their books and talking with pupils is proving to be very effective. Teachers are now held to account for the progress of their pupils in all areas of the curriculum. However, this information is not effectively incorporated into the school's self-evaluation. As a result, planning for improvement is sometimes unwieldy and not sufficiently focused on key priorities. Currently, leaders focus too much on the actions taken, rather than evaluating the differences these actions make to the quality of teaching and learning.

The previous inspection report identified many strengths including that pupils were developing their involvement within the school and the wider local community. Development of the numerous ways that pupils are able to express their opinions and see the impact is a real strength of the school. Pupils meet weekly in 'pupil voice' sessions to discuss what they want to do to improve the school further. For example, they now have more equipment available to them in lunch and playtimes. Not only is this having a positive impact on pupils' behaviour, which remains a strength of the school, but it is also effectively developing social and physical skills.

You have enriched the curriculum considerably since the previous inspection. Pupils enjoy a wide range of curriculum subjects together that inspire and meet their interests well. Pupils told me that 'learning is fun' and that 'teachers make learning interesting'. This was evident in the books that I looked at. As a result, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is promoted extremely well throughout subjects like geography, history and science. Enterprise is encouraged. Your 'fiver challenge' has motivated pupils to think about setting up their own business, and how to best manage money.

Parents are supportive of the school. They appreciate all the hard work that you and your staff do to ensure that their children are well cared for, and receive a good education. One parent, who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, said, 'Staff clearly work hard to ensure that children progress well but also to create fun and interesting activities.' At the time of the previous inspection, the reputation of the school was not as good as you wanted it to be. You have made it your mission to improve this. Parents who responded to Parent View were overwhelmingly supportive of the school and the work that it does. The staff survey equally reflects this view. Pupils use words like 'inspiring', 'amazing', 'friendly' and 'great atmosphere and fun' to describe the school.

You and your leaders have accurately assessed what still needs to be done to continue the school's journey to outstanding. You have identified many key priorities for the next academic year. You continue to refine these based on the accurate information you gather as this academic year ends. For example, you are aware of the need to improve progress for pupils, particularly in reading in key stage 2, and to ensure that any inconsistencies in the quality of teaching between classes continues to be identified and addressed. You have successfully recruited new staff in readiness for the new school year, which is a very different position from that of previous years.

Safeguarding is effective.

At the time of the previous inspection, safeguarding was judged to be good. You have worked hard to ensure that safeguarding continues to meet statutory requirements. All staff and governors understand the importance of keeping pupils safe and take their responsibilities seriously. For example, the chair of the governing body has recently visited the school and conducted a safeguarding audit with members of your staff. Part of the school's recent actions have included, for example, appointing a school family worker. This has been key in raising the profile of regular, punctual attendance for some groups of pupils. The relationship that the school now has with its families is stronger. The impact of this can be seen in improved attendance of individuals and groups of pupils, and parents' better understanding of the detrimental effect poor attendance can have on their child's progress.

Inspection findings

- Children enter the early years with skills and understanding that is expected of their age. They make good progress. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year continues to be above the national average. The early years leader has been instrumental in establishing good links with providers and parents.
- Year 1 pupils look set to achieve above the national average again this year in the phonics screening check, which means that they are prepared well to continue to achieve well at the end of Year 2. Attainment at the end of key stage 1 has been significantly above the national average for several years and looks set to continue. Pupils are well prepared for key stage 2.
- Internal assessment information, speaking with pupils and looking at work during my visit shows that pupils in Years 3 and 4 in particular have continued to make good progress throughout the lower part of key stage 2. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 have also made good progress from varying starting points, particularly given that many pupils join the school midway through key stage 2. Challenging targets have been set for pupils throughout the school and pupils are well aware of their targets, what they need to do to achieve them and who will help them.

- You have introduced an effective process for inducting new members of staff. Recruitment of teachers has been challenging but leaders have overcome these barriers and ensured that pupils' progress is not affected. Less experienced teachers and those new to the profession are mentored well by senior leaders. This puts the school in a good position for any future changes in staffing.
- The quality of teaching continues to be good across the school. Teachers and teaching assistants build positive working relationships with pupils to improve their progress. Sharing good practice regularly, looking at effective teaching and assessment, and developing middle leaders to better understand their subject responsibilities has ensured that this is a learning community. Much good practice has informed your 'must sees' in each classroom.
- You have made key appointments to senior leaders' roles, and they model leadership skills well. As a result, less experienced teachers and those very new to the profession are supported well in their teaching and how to lead areas of the wider curriculum other than English, mathematics and the early years.
- Leaders identify gaps in pupils' learning well. The proportion of pupils whose progress is accelerating in reading is increasing because of the decisive actions you have taken. Pupils' rates of progress in key stage 1 are good. You have identified that this is not as consistent in key stage 2 and have rightly prioritised this area for continued improvement. However, plans for improvement are not yet tightly focused. By sharpening these plans, leaders will be better able to target resources and see the impact that their actions have had on pupils' progress.
- The curriculum is developing well. You have been keen to ensure that the wider curriculum enhances pupils' development. Pupils welcome this and say that they enjoy what is taught and enjoy the challenge that is provided for pupils at all levels, but particularly the most able. Leaders have ensured that pupils use their knowledge, skills and understanding of mathematics and English in other areas of the curriculum.
- Progress of pupils currently in Year 2 is strong in English and mathematics. The school's own assessment information shows that these pupils are also likely to attain above the national average.
- Although pupils attain well at the end of key stage 2, their progress is not as good as it could be, particularly in reading. The school's current assessment information indicates that the pupils currently in Year 6 will be well prepared for their transition to secondary school. Your senior leaders and I looked at the work of these pupils and I agree that a considerable proportion of pupils have made excellent progress from their varying starting points, and considering that approximately half these pupils were not in the school in key stage 1.

- The teaching of phonics is good. Pupils use their skills well in both reading and writing. The evidence of this good work at an early age is clear in pupils' reading and writing throughout the school. The English subject leader has identified that the areas of focus in this year's plans for improvement have been entirely appropriate. As a result, reading progress and attainment have improved, as has pupils' access to a wider range of books.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvement planning at all levels is sharpened so that targets are more closely linked to emerging key priorities
- senior leaders' monitoring effectively informs the school's assessment of its own performance and influences future improvement plans
- pupils in key stage 2 continue to make the good progress that they make in key stage 1.

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

Yours sincerely

Ruth Brock
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, senior leaders, the chair of the governing body and three other governors, a group of pupils and a representative from the local authority. I looked at the 92 views expressed by parents in Parent View, and the 18 responses to the staff survey. I scrutinised the school's own assessment information and work in pupils' books with your senior leaders. I visited all classes, often with you, and spoke with individual pupils about their work. I reviewed a range of documentation including the school's plans for improvement and evaluation of its performance, minutes of meetings and all relevant documentation regarding safeguarding, including the single central record.