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Mr J Hood
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hood

Short inspection of Cowley Hill Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 July 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 December 2011.

This school continues to be good.

Since your appointment three years ago, you have acted upon the development points from the previous inspection. You have overseen many improvements in the overall quality of teaching, curriculum provision and outcomes for pupils at the school. You appointed a new deputy headteacher to the school's leadership structure and recently have increased leadership capacity by creating further roles across the school. You have therefore built a strong team of well-trained teachers and support staff who very effectively support pupils. With the full backing of the governing body, you have been able to provide additional training and development for all of your staff. This has included a very effective programme to 'grow your own' teachers from within existing staff. During times of considerable recruitment difficulties, this course of action has not only been effective in filling vacancies but also in ensuring that all teachers have the high expectations that you set for Cowley Hill.

You and your deputy headteacher regularly monitor the quality of teaching and learning. Through your good example, other senior leaders are developing the skills to monitor the phases or subject areas for which they have responsibility. The findings are used to identify what needs to be further improved. You have put in place support, training and mentoring for some teachers to ensure that pupils' achievement continues apace. Where teaching has not been as effective as you expect, you have not shied away from taking decisive action. As a result, your records show that much of the teaching across the school is good and an increasing proportion is outstanding. Inspection evidence seen during my visit confirms this to be so.

Staff have worked hard to ensure that pupils are given regular feedback and challenge in line with the school's new policy. However, this is not yet consistently so for higher-attaining pupils in all classes in mathematics and writing. Adults seen during my visits to classes were adept at challenging pupils. They asked pertinent questions, encouraging pupils to work collaboratively and independently at different points with great success. Pupils know what they are learning, what they need to do to improve their work and what they feel they want to 'do even better'. This has undoubtedly been helped by the considerable work that you and your team have done on assessment. There is now a clear system in place to ensure that teachers' judgements of where pupils are in their learning are accurate. The school works successfully with other local schools and the local authority to check on the accuracy of teachers' assessment. This has been particularly helpful, giving teachers confidence in their judgements where there has been a number of different staff in some classes. As a result, most teacher assessment is accurate. You are, however, aware that mathematics assessment in particular is not as accurate as it needs to be. Therefore, you know that the system continues to need refining. This will not only aid teachers and senior leaders but also governors in their monitoring of the effectiveness of teaching.

When you arrived at the school, you recognised that the provision in the early years classes needed to be improved. Working with the local authority, you have developed the three classes and the outdoor area. Children now have access to learning areas for writing, reading and physical development. You have invested in good resources for teachers so that they can plan according to children's interests. This is the biggest difference that you and your team now wish to develop further. Through a variety of forms of communication with parents, like 'wow' moments, teachers are better able to allow children to influence what is taught and when it happens. As a result, children make good progress from their varying starting points. Ongoing assessment of children's learning is well recorded and evidenced in 'learning journeys'. Parents' contribution to children's assessment is an area that you continue to develop.

Your strong leadership and high expectations have established a very positive and inclusive environment for learning throughout the school. The excellent provision in the small 'bases' – which are specifically for pupils who need support for speech and language – is assured because you have very effective teaching geared to individual pupils' needs. As a result, these pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the transition back into the classroom. We saw very effective support by teaching assistants both in the 'bases' and when pupils returned to class. The highly effective guidance that these adults provide enables pupils to take part in whole-class discussion and in small-group work. This intensive work has ensured that these pupils make at least expected progress and some make good progress. In our joint learning observation, we heard incorrect pronunciation of the sound 'th' from one adult. As this is a speech and language provision, it is essential that all adults use correct pronunciation as pupils will copy adults.

At the previous inspection, the enhancement of the good partnership with parents was an area for improvement. It is eminently clear from all the evidence seen during

this inspection that much has been done to continue to build on the already good relationships with parents. Not only do you have a considerable number of parents attending such events as the Year 6 production but a growing proportion also attend workshops. On the morning of the inspection, a mathematics 'open morning' for parents of children in the Reception classes took place. Parents told me how much they enjoyed such opportunities as these to work alongside their children and see for themselves how their child is developing in school. Children happily used weighing scales 'to try to make these balance', as one child said as they worked collaboratively with another. A parent told me that her child 'has progressed very well and is always happy to come to school'. This is but one example of how you have engaged with parents. To have over one hundred parents attend a reading workshop is truly a success for the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

All safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements. You and your senior leaders ensure that robust procedures for the safety and well-being of all pupils are applied with rigour. Governors are vigilant and take safeguarding very seriously. Training for all staff and governors in safeguarding is regular and fully up to date, including the government's recent guidance to counter radicalisation, 'Prevent'. You and two other senior leaders have undertaken training to enable you to deliver this training to others, including your governors.

Your school business manager oversees thorough checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children. Her role in following up absence of vulnerable pupils is crucial and is having a good impact on raising attendance for these pupils. You have fostered a very good relationship with parents through regular, daily contact on the school gates. You and your senior leaders therefore know pupils well and support parents very effectively. Parents say they appreciate the care that you and your staff provide and the lengths to which the school goes to ensure pupils receive the help they need. Progress of the most vulnerable pupils is monitored very closely to ensure that their needs are being fully met.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have relentlessly improved the quality of teaching across the school, always expecting the very best from their teachers and not accepting anything less than that. This has resulted in some changes in staffing which the school has managed very effectively with minimal impact on pupils' achievement. Leaders have successfully supported adults who work in the school to train as teachers. The impact of this is clear both in the classroom and in pupils' achievement. These less-experienced colleagues, in tandem with ever-developing leaders within the school, have much to offer other colleagues. Leaders are keen to share the expertise of all colleagues, which will undoubtedly benefit the whole school community.
- School leaders and governors make increasingly effective use of assessment and information to monitor school performance. The progress of pupils is tracked carefully to identify any underachievement and to target extra support if it is

needed. As a result, gaps in achievement for disadvantaged pupils are narrowing in reading, writing and mathematics in line with similar pupils nationally.

- Pupils make good progress overall, from low starting points in the Nursery. In 2015, they attained outcomes above those seen nationally at the end of key stage 1. Scrutiny of the pupils' books in key stage 1 confirms that most pupils are making expected progress. An increasing proportion of pupils are making more than expected progress in writing and mathematics. This includes the majority of the most able pupils and those who are disadvantaged, or have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This is because work is challenging and provides good, regular opportunities for pupils to use their basic English skills in writing. Pupils' outcomes in Year 1 are particularly impressive, because the proportion of these pupils who achieved a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year was below that expected.
- The school's own assessment information, confirmed by checks in books, evidences that there is a growing proportion of pupils in key stage 2 making good progress from their varying starting points. This is not yet consistent for some classes for the most able pupils in mathematics and writing. A number of pupils in Year 6 in 2015 and in 2016 joined the school part way through the key stage, but have made good progress since they arrived at Cowley Hill. Pupils in 2015 left key stage 2 attaining broadly in line with the national average in mathematics, reading and writing, including disadvantaged pupils. These pupils progressed well from standards at the end of key stage 1 which were below the national average. The proportion of pupils who achieved the higher levels of attainment was above the national average in 2015. This was a significant increase in attainment from key stage 1.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make at least expected and often good progress. This is because well-trained support staff work closely under the guidance of teachers. Staff from the 'bases' provide these pupils with very specific individual support, or work with them in class alongside other pupils. This support is very effective and sometimes leads to pupils having their support withdrawn in key stage 2 because of the outstanding progress they have made at this school.
- The provision for children in the Nursery and Reception classes has been improved so that children have good access to an ever-developing outdoor area. The provision has secured continued improvement and more children are on track to achieve a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year than in previous years. Scrutiny of the children's 'learning journals' confirms that all of these children make good progress from a low starting point. Children are well prepared for their start in Year 1.
- Governors work in close partnership with the headteacher, senior leaders and other staff with a leadership role to improve on the quality of education that the school provides. Together, their focus is clearly on improving the outcomes for pupils, narrowing gaps in achievement between different groups and enhancing the overall provision throughout the school. Governors make regular visits to

check at first hand on the quality of the school's work. As a result, the governing body has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and what needs to be improved further.

- A strong partnership exists between school leaders and the parent community. Many parents say that they are very impressed with how well their children are doing. One said, 'Teachers are very well prepared and well intentioned, giving the necessary attention to the pupils here'. A number of parents, in the free-text part of Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, say that they would appreciate clearer information about their child's progress and changes in staffing. However, evidence seen during the inspection suggests that leaders constantly review how they communicate with parents. Nevertheless, some aspects of the school's website are not as up to date as they might be. Leaders have accepted that this needs to be better managed in the future so that parents have the most appropriate information. Leaders do as much as they reasonably can to keep parents informed about staff changes.

Next steps for the school

To ensure continued improvement and no risk of a decline in outcomes at the next inspection, leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- systems for assessment continue to be refined so that leaders and governors have an accurate picture of pupils' progress and attainment
- higher-attaining pupils are consistently challenged by all adults so that they achieve the very best they can in writing and mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body 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

Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and the school business manager. Further meetings with the chair of the governing body and three other governors, and a representative from the local authority were also held. The inspector reviewed a wide range of documentation and jointly observed teaching and learning in classes with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. A thorough examination of the school's safeguarding arrangements was undertaken. Discussions were also held with pupils during classroom visits and with a group of pupils from

across the school about their work. The inspector met with a number of parents in the Reception classes. The inspector also reviewed the 61 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 26 free text messages.