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Mr Paul Ketley
Principal
Furley Park Primary Academy
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Dear Mr Ketley

Short inspection of Furley Park Primary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 20 September 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in November 2010.

This school continues to be good.

School leaders have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have ensured that the school has continued to improve, despite the potential distractions of the move to academy status and managing a major building project to facilitate the school's expansion from two to three forms of entry.

You know the school well and self-evaluation is effective. Because of this, you have identified the correct priorities for improvement and are tackling them effectively. The support given to you by your two vice-principals and other middle leaders has been instrumental in ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning has not slipped as the number of pupils on roll has gradually increased. This is all the more impressive when taking into account recent changes to the national curriculum and the school's new approach to the way that teachers plan learning and assess pupil progress.

During the inspection it was plain to see that pupils enjoy coming to school and show extremely good attitudes to learning. Classrooms were happy and industrious places. Older children were totally engaged in their work and were confident and knowledgeable when asked to explain what they were learning and why. Younger children in the early years were still finding their feet and coming to terms with their surroundings and the exciting opportunities to learn through play on offer to them.

Pupils told me that teachers expect a lot from them and that they are expected to work hard 'most of the time'. They used the word 'challenge' without being prompted, linking it to their work in all areas of the curriculum, not just their daily English and mathematics lessons. They were also very positive about the extra-curricular activities the school has to offer and talked with great enthusiasm about whole-school events such as the 'prom in the playground' event held at the end of the summer term.

All pupils benefit from bright and spacious classrooms that are resourced well, including the outdoor learning facilities for children in the early years. The new building used by pupils in Years 5 and 6 is particularly impressive. It was very noticeable that pupils, parents and staff are very proud of the school and its achievements to date. Parents in particular were positive when they talked to me. One group said that communication could sometimes be better, but nevertheless agreed that they would thoroughly recommend the school to new parents.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors recognised the many strengths of the school, including pupils' outstanding behaviour, strong early years provision, committed staff, and the impact of your leadership on motivating and inspiring everyone in the school. They also identified a need to ensure that pupils were provided with more opportunity to talk about their work and develop their speaking skills, as well as ensuring that pupils were challenged enough in mathematics. Leaders have addressed these matters effectively so that:

- pupils make good progress and attain well in mathematics across the school
- most pupils are confident and articulate when discussing their work, particularly when sharing their reasoning or views during lessons.

Since the last inspection, school leaders have continued the important process of self-evaluation in order to identify the most important priorities to improve the school. During my visit, you were able to explain the school's strengths, as well as the areas that need to be developed. These include accelerating the progress that pupils make in reading and writing as they move through key stage 2. We also agreed that the most able pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, need to make more progress in reading and writing, in order to fully achieve at the higher levels they are capable of.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders have created a culture that ensures that the safeguarding of children is the top priority in the school. The governing body takes its statutory duties seriously and is effective in monitoring arrangements to keep children safe. Day-to-day routines are given high importance. Children are taught how to stay safe when using the internet or social media. Staff are trained in safeguarding children at levels appropriate to their responsibilities and are up to date with the latest national priorities regarding the different risks to children.

During a formal discussion pupils told the inspector that they feel the school is a safe place to be and that staff care for them. All of the parents I talked to during my visit told me that they feel their children are safe at school.

Inspection findings

- You lead the school by example and hold the respect of pupils, parents and staff alike. Your ability to motivate and encourage staff to give their best has been crucial in maintaining standards in the school during a time of recent change.
- Members of the wider leadership team are committed. They support you very well and are effective in their differing roles. The understated yet very efficient way that they supported you during the inspection was testament to the quality of leadership and management of the school.
- Governance of the school and across the multi-academy trust as a whole is evolving and developing well. Communication between the board of trustees and the school's local governing body is strong. This means that school leaders are held to account effectively and the strategic direction of the school is overseen in an appropriate manner.
- Children in the Reception classes make good progress from their different starting points. Due to the good and improving quality of provision in the early years, an increasing proportion of children are achieving a good level of development each year and are well prepared for their move into Year 1.
- The school's phonics provision is effective. Most pupils, including those pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, achieve the expected standard by the end of Year 2.
- Pupils make good progress as they move through the school, although there are variations across different year groups and in different subjects. In the recent past, pupils' progress in reading and writing has not been as strong as that seen in mathematics. As a result of the actions taken by leaders, this situation is improving, especially for the most able pupils who are capable of achieving at higher levels.
- Leaders, including governors, are aware that improving the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils should be a high priority. Because of this, pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are making better progress than seen in the past, especially as they move through key stage 2.
- Provision for the few pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is good. Staff are sensitive to their needs and provide the right level of support and challenge both in and out of the classroom. Parents were particularly positive about this aspect of the school's work.
- Pupils behave well and show excellent attitudes to learning. They told the inspector that their learning is rarely disrupted in classrooms and that staff deal well with problems if they arise.
- Attendance rates are broadly in line with national averages, although the school has had to work sensitively to support pupils from vulnerable backgrounds in the recent past. The appointment of two learning mentors, whose duties include supporting children whose attendance is not as strong as it might be, is having a positive impact on reducing rates of absence.
- Despite converting to academy status, the school has maintained close links with the local authority. Partnerships with local schools are also strong. This includes the close links with the partner school in the multi-academy trust. Because of these links, staff benefit from a wide range of professional development, including support and collaboration with colleagues from other schools when developing the new system to track pupil progress.

- Most parents are very supportive of the school. The very large majority of those who spoke to me or responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, were very positive about the quality of education that the school offers.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils make more progress in reading and writing so that their attainment improves to at least match that seen in mathematics by the end of key stage 2
- teachers are more consistent in the levels of challenge that they offer the most able pupils, so that this group fully achieve the higher standards they are capable of.

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. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Clive Close

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Throughout the inspection I particularly focused on the safety and behaviour of pupils; attendance, including that of vulnerable groups; and the progress and achievements of pupils, including that of disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils. During the inspection I met with you, non-teaching support staff, two groups of pupils and the chair of the governing body, accompanied by two other governors. I also held a telephone conversation with the chair of the board of directors. You accompanied me as I visited classrooms in every year group, talking to pupils about their learning and looking at the quality of their work. I also took the opportunity to listen to a number of pupils read. I observed pupils' behaviour in and around the school. I talked to parents at the beginning of the day, took into account the 48 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the free text responses submitted by parents. I analysed a wide range of documentation, including information about the progress and achievements of pupils, your own self-evaluation, the school improvement plan and minutes of the meetings of the governing body. The safeguarding policy, single central record of staff checks and other records and procedures to keep pupils safe were also scrutinised.