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Mrs Helen Borley
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Borley

Short inspection of Ashford Hill Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 14 December 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 November 2011.

This school continues to be good.

You have led the school with determination to ensure that pupils receive a good standard of education in an inclusive, caring environment. You are supported and challenged ably by senior leaders and governors who share your vision that all should 'strive to be the best they can be every day'. You have maintained the good quality of education since the last inspection because you have worked hard to make sure that all aspects of the school reflect your ethos that 'learning is about creating meaning from experience'. Staff feel valued and work effectively together to ensure that teaching is of consistently good quality across the school. Pupils of all ages support each other both in their learning and play. Parents are extremely approving of the positive impact you have had. A parent summarised the views of many by stating, 'The headteacher is exceptional. She sets high standards for the children. Everyone is approachable and focused on the children.'

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They display splendid attitudes to learning in the classroom and play happily together at breaktimes. Pupils concentrate well and participate confidently. In the end of term assembly which pupils planned themselves, all pupils were part of the performance. They listened politely when it was not their turn, and joined in with singing sensibly and passionately. Pupils thrive on opportunities to show leadership skills. The student council is active in discussing with leaders ways to make their school even better. Representatives of the council enthusiastically show visitors around the school, highlighting the opportunities they get to develop their social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding, for example by pointing out the inspirational quotations which they

have chosen to adorn the walls. They are especially proud of their link with pupils who attend a school in Africa. They communicate with these pupils regularly, sharing their work and learning about the similarities and differences of their way of life.

You, school leaders and governors use your accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school to prioritise actions to take. You have focused rightly on improving further the quality of teaching and learning and the way that assessment information is used to track the progress that pupils are making. Currently, more pupils than the national average achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at key stage 1 and key stage 2. However, not enough make rapid progress so that they reach the 'greater depth' standard, particularly those who are middle attainers. A sharper focus on planning learning so it meets the needs of pupils from their different starting points will help to address this.

At the last inspection, inspectors asked the school to provide more sophisticated opportunities for pupils to be involved in the assessment of their learning and to ensure that pupils are clear about what they need to do to improve their work to reach the next level. You have achieved this largely through an emphasis on building resilience in pupils so that they are not afraid to make mistakes and are happy to talk about what they can and can't do 'yet'. Leaders and governors encourage pupils to direct their own learning. For example, pupils in key stage 1 and 2 regularly choose their own weekly spellings to improve, and in the early years children spontaneously changed the 'post office' area into 'Santa's workshop' so their play involved making toys for Christmas.

Your work to meet the recommendation from the previous inspection to strengthen the application of pupils' calculation skills in practical and investigative mathematics has focused on making sure that teaching of mathematics improves across the school. Children in the early years are encouraged to use counting in their play, while pupils in key stage 2 excitedly used cubes to help them understand how to multiply fractions. You have, however, identified rightly that pupils do not make enough progress in mathematics, so work is ongoing to provide more opportunities for them to demonstrate their reasoning skills and deepen their understanding of mathematical concepts.

One of your strengths as a headteacher is your willingness to seek advice to revamp aspects of the school that need to improve further. As an example, middle leaders clearly value the training and support you commissioned from the local authority, which has helped them to identify how to improve outcomes in phonics and start to put improvements into practice.

Safeguarding is effective.

You are committed to ensuring that safeguarding is at the heart of everything you do, so that pupils are safe at all times and that a culture of care permeates the school. Strong relationships between staff and pupils mean that pupils are confident

that any concerns they have will be followed up rapidly and effectively. There are well-planned opportunities for pupils to learn to keep themselves safe, including online. Parents praise highly the 'family atmosphere' and care their children receive. As one parent wrote, 'This is a great small school that not only educates my children, it also cares for my children's well-being.'

School leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of good quality. Leaders ensure that thorough checks are carried out on staff and other adults when they work or volunteer at the school. All staff receive appropriate training and are alert to any concerns, which they follow up swiftly. You involve families and seek advice from other agencies when necessary. Governors' monitoring of all aspects of safeguarding is particularly strong.

Inspection findings

- Governance of the school is strong. The chair of governors in particular is driven to improve the school continually. Governors participate in regular training to improve their skills. For example, training in how to evaluate the school's effectiveness more precisely has sharpened their understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. This has allowed governors to provide effective challenge and support for school leaders so that collectively leaders and governors identify accurate next steps in school improvement planning. The governing body's strengths have been recognised by the local authority, so governors now also support a local school in improving strategic leadership.
- Teaching across the school is inclusive and purposeful. Teachers' good subject knowledge helps pupils to learn effectively. Teachers make sure that pupils are clear about what they are learning. They have created an atmosphere where pupils are happy to talk about areas they find challenging and want to make improvements to their work. Consequently, more pupils achieve expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics than the national average.
- However, you recognise that teachers do not always plan learning to help pupils to progress rapidly from their different starting points. This means that few pupils, particularly those who are middle attainers, achieve the greater depth of understanding of which they are capable. The school's information about current pupil performance and work in books reflects this.
- Leaders' tracking of assessment and monitoring of the progress that pupils make has improved. This is allowing you to offer more precise support for pupils who need help to catch up. Teaching assistants work highly effectively with pupils with a wide range of needs to improve their reading and mathematical skills.
- Children in the early years grow in confidence and are given a range of opportunities to build the foundations of writing, reading and mathematics. They are well supported by adults in the different activities they choose. A high proportion of children in the early years achieve a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year.
- Typically, a lower proportion of pupils than the national average achieve the

expected standard in the phonics check at the end of Year 1. Leaders have been quick to investigate why this is, taking advice from the local authority and carrying out their own research, with improvements already underway to remedy the situation. Teaching is helping children in the early years to recognise letters and to develop their understanding of the sounds letters make. In key stage 1, pupils are starting to blend sounds effectively and practise writing words. However, there is variability across the school in building on what pupils can already do, and in moving them on rapidly to the next steps in developing their reading and writing skills.

- Pupils' reading improves as they progress up the school. Parents commented that 'Once they have the grounding of phonics they fly through key stage 1'. They read fluently, applying their knowledge of letters and sounds to decipher difficult words accurately. The most able readers use expression well to bring the text to life for the listener. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the types of books they like to read. They speak highly of their teachers, who help them to discover new books and authors.
- Leaders have worked diligently to meet the needs of potentially vulnerable pupils, including those in receipt of free school meals and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Support is highly bespoke for each pupil so that all make good progress over time, both academically and emotionally. This includes, for example, visiting different local businesses to raise aspirations about possible future careers.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils attend school regularly so that overall attendance is consistently above national averages. In 2015, no pupils were persistently absent. This has been achieved because leaders work effectively with parents, particularly those with potentially vulnerable children, to highlight the importance of regular attendance for all. Leaders and governors are confident that their efforts to ensure a positive learning ethos mean that 'pupils want to be here'.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- ensure that teaching in phonics is consistently strong in the early years and key stage 1 so that even more pupils reach the standards expected of them by the end of Years 1 and 2
- increase the progress that pupils make so that a higher proportion of pupils, including those who are middle attainers, reach greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics at each key stage
- provide more opportunities for pupils to reason and solve problems in mathematics so that they achieve both a greater depth in their understanding and also do this more rapidly.

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

Yours sincerely

Catherine Old
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, some middle leaders, and three governors including the chair of the governing body. I held telephone conversations with a further governor and with a representative of the local authority. We visited classes together to see pupils' learning in phonics. I made further visits to all classes across all year groups to see pupils' learning in mathematics and guided reading. With middle leaders I reviewed samples of pupils' work and viewed pupils' work during lessons. I listened to pupils read and spoke to pupils in lessons, on the playground and during a pupil-led tour at the start of the day. I took account of the 48 responses to the online pupil survey and the 16 responses to the staff survey. I met with a group of parents, spoke to one parent on the telephone and took account of the 49 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including free text responses. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including information about school improvement, pupils' achievement, and attendance. I checked safeguarding records, policies and procedures. I also looked at and discussed with you the evaluation of the school's effectiveness.

I focused on how effectively leaders have continued to improve the school's effectiveness and addressed the areas for improvement identified at the time of the last inspection. I examined the progress that pupils have made from their starting points, because few pupils reached the highest levels of attainment, known as 'greater depth'. I considered whether pupils make enough progress in mathematics. I focused on the early years and key stage 1 to make certain that leaders are maintaining high outcomes and achieving more highly in phonics. I evaluated how well leaders ensure that the needs of vulnerable pupils are met through creating a culture of care and for learning. In addition, I evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding.