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Mr John Robinson
Headteacher
Howard Primary School
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Dear Mr Robinson

Short inspection of Howard 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 December 2011.

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 worked effectively with other leaders and governors to ensure that the school has remained good through its period of expansion to two classes per year group. The areas for improvement identified in your last inspection report have been tackled well. Your governors provide skilful challenge and support. They understand the school's priorities for improvement comprehensively because of their deep involvement in the life of the school. The local authority has provided additional, well-informed challenge and support as your school has grown.

Your commitment to preparing pupils thoroughly for their future lives is imprinted on every aspect of the school's work. Pupils understand that their opinions matter and that their voices are heard. Parents appreciate your tenacity in securing the best outcomes for pupils, even when barriers to learning are significant. For example, one of your language ambassadors welcomes pupils arriving at the school with little English, celebrating the 46 languages currently spoken in the school.

You have been determined to strengthen the skills of middle leaders and broaden their contribution to school improvement since the last inspection. They now offer robust challenge and support the development of teaching effectively. As a result, you have continued to improve outcomes for pupils. The effectiveness of the early years has improved. Pupils understand how to improve their writing more clearly

than they did at the time of last inspection. Teachers challenge the most able pupils to deepen their thinking skilfully. However, we agreed that the use of questioning by teachers could be strengthened further.

You ensure that the skills and enthusiasm of individual members of staff are brought to the fore to enrich the school's curriculum. We agreed that the further development of middle leaders' skills should remain a key priority in your plans for improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You work effectively with leaders and governors to make sure that the arrangements for safeguarding are well understood and consistently applied. Your checks on the suitability of staff comply with current guidance. Members of staff are kept up to date with the most recent safeguarding guidance. Governors are very knowledgeable about specific potential risks to particular groups of pupils. You ensure that the curriculum provides pupils with opportunities to develop the necessary skills to evaluate risk and keep themselves safe. Concerns are referred promptly and recorded thoroughly.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection we agreed to look closely at provision for developing early reading skills in the early years and key stage 1. The early years was an area for improvement at the last inspection. There had been gaps in attainment between disadvantaged children and others in the setting.
- Our visits to classrooms and my scrutiny of your information about children's progress in the current school year confirm that teachers provide consistently effective support in reading lessons. Phonics is taught skilfully as a result of the good training you have continued to provide. You follow this up with regular checks on the consistency of phonics teaching and act promptly if more support is necessary. As a result, pupils are making good progress in their reading. The pupils who read to me were able to use their phonics skills confidently. They are given books appropriate to the level of ability.
- The proportion of children attaining a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year has improved over the last three years. At the same time, the differences in outcomes for disadvantaged children have diminished rapidly. In the current school year, your current information indicates that these positive trends are continuing.
- We also looked together at the provision for most-able readers in Years 5 and 6. This included the most able disadvantaged pupils. The guided sessions seen were helping pupils deepen their understanding of some challenging texts, including classical literature. Pupils who read to me were passionate about the role of reading in their lives. In guided sessions, teachers expect pupils to think hard about the content of the books they read. They understand the importance of

thinking of effective questions when challenging pupils to deepen their understanding and gather evidence from texts to support their views. Your leadership team are providing strong models of good practice for others to follow. We agreed that the most able readers could be challenged even better by continuing to develop the skills of teachers to ask really effective questions.

- Another line of enquiry was about the provision for less-able writers in key stage 1 and lower key stage 2. This included pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. My scrutiny of pupils' work and discussion with school leaders convinced me that these pupils receive guidance on how to improve their writing which they understand clearly. They are taught how each stage of the writing process contributes to the quality of their final piece of work. Teachers pick up on good examples from pupils' own writing drafts and from literature to exemplify effective use of language. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. It has ensured that boys and disadvantaged pupils are making much better progress in the current school year.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive effective support from additional adults when writing at length and are making good progress from their starting points. Leaders are checking up on smaller steps in their progress using a refined assessment system. This allows them to better understand what is leading to good progress and helps them decide what to do when pupils' progress slows.

Next steps for the school

- Continue to strengthen the skills of middle leaders in developing and evaluating the quality and impact of teaching.
- Take further action to strengthen all teachers' skills in questioning the most able pupils so that these pupils are prompted even more effectively to deepen their understanding.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Wright
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Following discussions with school leaders, we agreed on the following lines of enquiry during the inspection:

- The effectiveness of the early years and key stage 1 provision in developing pupils' early reading skills and diminishing differences in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.
- The progress of the most able and the most able disadvantaged pupils in reading in Years 5 and 6.
- The quality of provision for weaker learners to develop their writing in Years 1 to 4.
- The quality of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, particularly with regard to their progress in writing.
- The work of leaders and governors to ensure that safeguarding is effective for all groups of pupils.

I held discussions with members of the senior leadership team and middle leaders. I spoke to representatives of the governing body and the local authority. I visited reading lessons with senior leaders, sampling pupils' work and talking to pupils about their learning. I heard some pupils of different abilities read. I also looked at a sample of pupils' writing in the current school year and scrutinised documents related to safeguarding and school improvement. Responses to the online Parent View survey were taken into account together with written submissions from parents and the school's own survey of parents' views.