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Mr Malcolm Moaby
Headteacher
Whitehill Primary School
Sun Lane
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Dear Mr Moaby

Short inspection of Whitehill Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 January 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Timothy Rome, 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment, first as acting headteacher then as the substantive headteacher in November 2015, you have successfully led the school through a period of considerable change. Standards had declined since the previous inspection and you lost no time in raising the expectations of staff and pupils.

You have created a strong leadership team that shares your commitment and steely determination to forge further improvements. You have appointed several new teachers, ensuring that they have the skills, expertise and experience to meet your high standards and raise the quality of teaching and learning. You have regained the confidence of parents, who commented on the positive changes you have made. 'The new headteacher has done fabulous work in raising the standard of the school,' and 'Since the headteacher has taken over, we have seen massive improvements in how the school is run, as well as the rate our child is progressing' are typical of the many comments. The school's reputation in the community has grown, leading one parent to write, 'Whitehill is now a school which I am proud to take my child to.'

Pupils learn in a happy, safe and calm atmosphere. They behave well, enjoy learning and want to do well. Parents and pupils agreed that the school is, as its motto states, 'Happy, helpful and hardworking.' Leaders have correctly focused on

raising pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils are now making better than expected progress in these areas and you are working to ensure that similar gains are made in a range of other subjects. There is a sharp awareness that some pupils, particularly those in key stage 2, need to make even faster progress to catch up because of the legacy of underachievement. This includes some of the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged. These pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive focused attention and carefully planned support, both in and out of lessons.

You rapidly identified the main priorities for improvement that emerged in the period following the previous inspection. You have established the appropriate actions for leaders and staff to take in order to address these priorities. At the same time, you are mindful of those aspects identified as needing improvement at the previous inspection before the school became an academy. Your strategic actions to raise achievement in mathematics are evident in pupils' increasing depth of knowledge and understanding, and their ability in mathematical reasoning. There is absolutely no complacency. You acknowledge that to make the necessary, very rapid progress, pupils need to be challenged further and expectations need to be consistently high in all classes.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a strong and effective culture of safeguarding in the school. Pupils feel safe and all parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school keeps their children safe. One parent wrote: 'In the last year safety in and around the school has been really improved and the children and I feel confident that they have done all they can to make it a secure environment to learn.'

Staff receive regular and appropriate training about safeguarding and know that they are all responsible for pupils' welfare and safety. New staff to the school are fully informed of the school's safeguarding procedures before they start, so that they are confident to report any concerns that may arise. All statutory checks on adults are made and recorded carefully on the single central register.

The designated safeguarding leaders have updated their training and are highly effective. Pupils are provided with immediate and appropriate support when necessary. The family liaison officer makes a significant contribution to the school's rigorous safeguarding procedures. In addition, she provides valued support to pupils and their families. She ensures that records are detailed and of high quality and that, when necessary, there are effective links with outside agencies. You and the family liaison officer are diligent in your work to reduce the absence rate of some pupils who do not attend as regularly as they should. Attendance is improving, although it remains below average.

Inspection findings

- The inspectors focused, in particular, on the following aspects during the

inspection: the effectiveness of the school's work to keep pupils safe; how well reading is taught throughout the school; how well children make progress from their starting points in the early years and the effectiveness of leadership and management.

- Since your arrival, a key priority has been to improve the early years provision. Children in the Nursery and Reception Year now make good progress from their starting points. Children enter the early years with attainment below what is typically expected for their ages, particularly in communication and language, and reading and writing skills. You have invested in transforming the early years provision, including staffing, the environment, strong leadership and raising expectations. As a result, the proportion of children who achieved a good level of development in 2016 increased dramatically to well above the national figure, from the previous below average outcomes. Children in the early years receive a strong foundation and are well prepared to continue their learning and make good progress in key stage 1.
- You quickly identified reading as an area to improve across the school. It is now clearly evident that pupils of all ages and in all groups, including disadvantaged pupils, are motivated and enjoy reading. Many parents commented on their satisfaction with their children's reading progress and enthusiasm for reading for pleasure. The approaches to reading that you have introduced inspire pupils. Pupils spoke with great enthusiasm about the books and authors that their teachers have introduced to them. A group of pupils agreed that the class novel was so good that they wanted to find other books written by the same author and were delighted to discover that he has written eleven more. 'We want to get them all,' was the response from the group. Older pupils, and the most able pupils in both key stages, read with confidence and fluency. Small-group reading sessions are helping pupils to achieve a greater depth of understanding of characters, settings and plot. High-quality texts are used as a stimulus for a range of learning activities, particularly in writing. Pupils' rich reading diet is having a positive impact on the quality of their writing and their vocabulary.
- The systematic teaching of phonics skills has strengthened significantly. The proportion of pupils reaching the required standard in the Year 1 phonics check improved considerably in 2016. Pupils' current performance indicates that this improving trend will continue bringing outcomes close to the national average in 2017. Pupils use their phonics skills well to help them read unfamiliar words. Teachers and teaching assistants are skilled in teaching phonics through the new approach the school has adopted. They now need to ensure that they are pitching work at the right level so that tasks are not too easy and pupils are challenged appropriately.
- You, trust members, the interim board and your leadership team have demonstrated clear capacity to make further improvement. The success of your work in reversing the decline in standards means that the school remains good. Of note are the significant change in the culture of the school and its increasingly good standing in the community. Although standards by the end of key stages 1 and 2 remained below the national expectations in 2016, they are improving. This is evident in pupils' current work and in the progress they are making in reading, writing and mathematics, although some inconsistencies in teachers'

expectations across different classes remain. You have instigated high-quality external support to help drive the pace, and success, of school improvement. External reviews endorse the success of your leadership. The changes you have made have had a direct and rapid impact on the quality of teaching and learning and outcomes for pupils. Your plans for further improvement are ambitious, clear and appropriate.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers' expectations of all pupils are consistently high in all classes so that pupils are challenged appropriately
- progress is even more rapid for those pupils who need to catch up because of a legacy of underachievement
- pupils make strong and sustained progress across a range of subjects.

I am copying this letter to the executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Coussins
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspectors met with you, other leaders in the school and three members of the interim trust board. The lead inspector also spoke to a member of the external school improvement team on the telephone. You accompanied us on most of our visits to classes. During these visits, the inspectors spoke to pupils about their learning, looked at their work, heard them read and discussed their views on reading. We spoke with parents at the start of the school day and took account of 51 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, which included 39 written comments. The lead inspector reviewed the school's website. The inspectors sampled a range of documents and records, including external evaluations of the school from the school improvement team and the regional schools commissioner. We looked at information about pupils' achievement, records of leaders' checks on the quality of teaching, the school improvement plan and documents relating to safeguarding. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness.