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Ali Dakin
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Dakin

Short inspection of Harcourt Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 31 January 2017, 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 March 2013.

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 shown strong leadership and the appointment of energetic senior and middle leaders last September provided fresh impetus for further improvement. The continued success of the school is based on your detailed knowledge of your pupils and an unwavering determination to enable them to achieve as well as possible.

Leaders and governors have created a culture which is open and welcoming. A sense of mutual trust, respect and support pervades the school. Both staff and pupils are keen to learn and improve their skills. All members of the school's community acknowledge pupils' differences and work in harmony to help each other. This was evident even in Reception Year. In all of the classes, when pupils meet their targets, this is shared and celebrated by other pupils.

The school has improved since the last inspection because you, school leaders and governors use your accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school to prioritise actions to take. Leaders set out to address systematically aspects of the school which could be even better. Following the previous inspection, leaders took effective action to strengthen teaching throughout the school further. There are now more opportunities for staff to share the best practice. Leaders sensibly use more experienced practitioners to support newer ones, draw on local expertise and act on the sound advice of local authority advisers.

Regular assessment takes place to check pupils' rates of progress, and thorough analysis of the data helps leaders and teachers identify who needs extra support. Highly trained teaching assistants help pupils to catch up effectively. A revised feedback policy outlines expectations of teachers to provide precise advice to pupils about how to improve their work and how pupils are expected to act on this advice. Your monitoring shows that these expectations have been implemented across the school in a consistent way, which has particularly helped pupils improve their writing. Pupils' outcomes in 2016 show that in both key stages 1 and 2, pupils' progress in writing was above national levels. Work in pupils' books is well presented.

You rightly identified that pupils' progress in reading was not as strong as in writing and mathematics. Consequently, your English leader has carefully planned and introduced a new way of teaching reading. This is at an early stage, but has already improved parental involvement in their children's reading. Your mathematics leader has set out determinedly to raise expectations and improve the quality of feedback in mathematics. Again, early signs are encouraging, but the full impact is not yet evident. You have taken effective steps to improve phonics teaching in Year 1. Your phonics leader monitors pupils' achievements closely and intervenes quickly when she finds pupils who are not making rapid progress.

You use your exceptionally detailed knowledge about the difficulties faced by some disadvantaged pupils to apply strategies to help them. These actions are generally successful, and the rate of progress of disadvantaged pupils is accelerating. However, you are aware of the need to improve the performance of the most able pupils in the school, including the most able disadvantaged pupils. Steps already taken to improve reading, mathematics and writing across the curriculum are starting to address this.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of good quality. You are committed to ensuring that pupils are safe at all times and that a culture of safeguarding permeates the school. Leaders ensure that staff receive appropriate training. Staff know pupils very well and they are alert to any concerns, which they follow up swiftly. They ensure they seek the right advice from other agencies when necessary. The family liaison officer works effectively with families and children experiencing difficulties. Parents, staff and pupils are united in their view that pupils are safe in school. There are well-planned opportunities for pupils to learn to keep themselves safe, including online safety. Pupils are confident that any concerns about bullying will be followed up rapidly and effectively and they speak warmly about a learning mentor who helps them develop their social skills.

Inspection findings

- In September, the assistant headteacher, who had the most experience of teaching phonics, was moved to teach Year 1 in order to improve outcomes. The school's information shows that the proportion of pupils on track to meet the

phonics check standard by the end of Year 1 is likely to meet the high levels previously achieved by the end of Year 2.

- Previously published results show that fewer pupils have achieved the highest standard of work compared with national levels. School leaders are aware of the need to address this, although it does not appear as a priority in the school's plans. The school's information shows that steps already taken to improve teaching and learning have improved the proportion of pupils working at greater depth.
- Leaders are trying a new strategy to improve attendance. They are participating in a project to reduce levels of absence of pupils whose attendance falls below 95%. The family liaison officer is working closely with other agencies to coordinate support for some target families.
- Leaders are working hard to improve parental engagement and, during the inspection, several parents were enjoying an informal event focusing on the teaching of mathematics. Parental support for the school is strong: nearly nine out of 10 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school.
- Highly committed senior and middle leaders have taken action to address some inconsistencies in pupils' performance across the school in different subjects and in different classes. They are very clear about what needs to be achieved and are systematic in their approaches to improvement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- sharpen their focus on raising the achievement of the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils
- continue work already started to improve levels of consistency of teaching across the curriculum.

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

Theresa Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your assistant headteacher, three middle leaders and two governors including the chair of the governing body. I also met a representative of Kent Local Authority. I visited classes across all year groups in the school with you. I reviewed samples of pupils' work in writing, mathematics and topic books across key stages 1

and 2. I considered 10 responses by staff and nine responses by pupils to Ofsted's online surveys. I took careful account of 50 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including free text responses, and conversations with parents attending a 'parents' café'. I spoke with pupils from across the school during playtime. I looked at documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, information about pupils' learning and progress, minutes of meetings and records regarding safeguarding and attendance.