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Dear Miss Pidgeon

Short inspection of Trotts Hill Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 08 February 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 January 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and the deputy headteacher are doing a fine job in leading the school during the interim period until governors appoint a permanent headteacher. You are both ensuring that consistency in good-quality teaching and learning, established over time, is maintained, as well as the school's strong ethos and values that parents appreciate so much. You lead by example. The school runs smoothly, like a well-oiled machine, because routines for pupils are so well established. I was able to confirm that parents have many opportunities to find out about their children's progress, which is one of the aspects that I looked at in more detail during the inspection. You have changed the format of reports, you provide them with information about how subjects are taught and encourage them to attend workshops. Parents responding to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were overwhelmingly positive. They commented:

- 'The leadership, teaching and friendly environment is what makes this such a good school.'
- 'Teachers invite parents to the school for talks which helps us to understand the curriculum and how we can support our children.'
- 'Teachers bring subjects to life with fun teaching.'
- 'Staff love working in the school and are passionate about what they do.'
- 'The school develops the whole child and cares for each individual.'
- 'The unique family feel makes my children feel happy, safe and secure.'

You and the deputy headteacher share a firm ambition for teaching and learning to be the best that they can be. This shone through strongly in all of our conversations. You have made some changes to strengthen them further. For example, you have used external consultants to train staff in teaching and assessing reading more effectively, so that pupils' attainment in reading rises to above average. You have adjusted the timetable so that pupils access a range of reading activities daily. In addition, parents have had the opportunity to attend a workshop about helping their children with reading at home. Staff have confidence in your leadership, as seen in the extremely positive responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. You have a strong team of teachers and teaching assistants supporting your drive for improvement. They take pride in the school building, which offers a rich, stimulating and interesting environment for learning. Eye-catching displays of pupils' work celebrate their achievements across a range of subjects and the library is beautifully kept to encourage pupils to browse, read and enjoy books. Leaders of subjects are knowledgeable and passionate about their subjects. This is why pupils achieve well, not only in English and mathematics but in other subjects too, such as computing, history, geography and physical education.

Since the previous inspection, pupils' attainment has risen from average to above average in writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2. Using the pupil premium, you provide a range of extra support and activities to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. However, as you know through your evaluation of their learning, some of them have not been performing as well as other pupils. This is why I identified this to explore as a key line of enquiry during this inspection. You have set out your roles in monitoring disadvantaged pupils' achievement as a priority in the school improvement plan. However, this focus does not follow through into the subsequent planned actions to raise achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. You have not set specific measurable targets for disadvantaged pupils' progress and attainment in each subject. In addition, you are taking steps to improve the attendance of the few disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent, by referring them to the appropriate services. However, there is more to do to engage with their parents, for example by inviting them into school to discuss the reasons leading to their poor attendance.

I checked to see if leaders and governors had successfully addressed areas for improvement from the previous inspection, and they have. Pupils are now suitably challenged in all subjects. We saw examples of science, writing and mathematics teaching where pupils of all abilities, including the most able pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, were being stretched in their learning. This also showed in the work in their books. Teachers are using questioning to good effect to deepen pupils' understanding and they are encouraging them to explain their thinking much more than they did at the time of the previous inspection. You and the governing body are using measurable criteria to check the impact of your school improvement work, as outlined in the plan. In addition, you use external advisers and consultants well to double check that your judgements are accurate.

Governors know the school well and support leaders and staff well. They are becoming proactive in responding to the expectations set by the Department for Education (DfE) for governance and accountability. Nonetheless, there is work to do to ensure that they form an independent view of the school's work through regular monitoring. Governors are addressing this and they are beginning to challenge leaders confidently and hold them to account. Rightly, the governing body is currently focused on appointing a permanent headteacher to preserve the school's discernible success in ensuring that pupils achieve well academically and in their personal development.

Everyone is valued at Trotts Hill, especially the pupils. From the very start in Nursery through to the end of Year 6, staff nurture in pupils a strong desire for, and enjoyment in, learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have made essential adjustments to ensure that safeguarding meets requirements and you and governors have acted on useful advice from the local authority to strengthen safeguarding arrangements. Following training, you have ensured that the single central record of statutory checks on all staff and adults working with pupils is completed properly to ensure their suitability to work with children. You and the governors ensure that requirements for recruiting staff are followed carefully and documents to evidence this are held securely in staff files.

Policies for safeguarding and child protection have been updated and reflect the latest guidance from the DfE. Staff receive regular training and updates about safeguarding to ensure that they are kept informed of any key changes.

You have revised systems for recording information and insist that staff log their concerns with you in writing. Confidential information in pupils' files is kept in good chronological order for easy access. Actions are recorded diligently.

Inspection findings

- Scrutiny of the school's data shows that pupils' overall attainment is rising impressively in Reception, key stage 1 and key stage 2. Very few pupils move into Year 3 without reaching the expected standard in the national phonics screening check. Attainment in science is above average.
- Our observations in lessons and scrutiny of the school's latest information about pupils' learning support the improvements seen in the 2016 results.
- Teaching is strong across the school and weaknesses identified in the previous inspection have been addressed. It caters well for pupils' differing needs, abilities and interests in the full range of subjects. We saw examples where teachers asked open-ended questions that made pupils reflect, reason and justify their thinking. Pupils discussed their work and shared their ideas readily because teachers are allocating more time to this in their teaching.

- You have taken steps to improve provision for disadvantaged pupils. The pupil premium is being used well this year to provide extra help to move their learning forward quickly. You also ensure they access enrichment activities such as trips, visits and clubs to broaden their experiences and build their self-esteem. This is contributing to the at least expected progress that they are making.
- The work we looked at in disadvantaged pupils' books in every class, including the early years classes, provided secure evidence that the good-quality provision is having a positive impact on their learning. Nonetheless, in the school's plans to raise all pupils' achievement, specific targets have not been set for disadvantaged pupils as a discrete group.
- Leaders of English, mathematics, computing, history, geography and physical education lead their subjects with confidence and authority. They know how to gather evidence that tells them what aspects of teaching are effective and what could be even better. They provide effective training and coaching for staff to further extend their good knowledge, skills and understanding. Their approach contributes to pupils' strong achievement across the full range of subjects.
- You have made some changes to promote and strengthen partnerships with parents. Of the 46 parents who responded to Parent View, 94% stated that they agree or strongly agree that they receive valuable information from the school about their child's progress. Some parents substantiated this in the comments they made. They particularly noted the increase in opportunities to come into school to learn more about the curriculum and how to help their children at home.
- Contact with the parents of the very few disadvantaged pupils who do not attend regularly is not frequent enough to secure their strong commitment to improving their child's attendance. Communication is mainly through letters home or contact by the local authority's attendance officer.
- Governance is improving in terms of the level of challenge governors are providing. However, when monitoring the school's work, they have relied mainly on what leaders tell them without checking out its accuracy. Realising this, they are beginning to form an independent view of the school's work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- explicit, challenging targets are set to raise disadvantaged pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics
- they meet more frequently with parents of the few disadvantaged pupils who do not attend school as regularly as they should, to determine how this can be improved
- governors monitor the school's work rigorously and independently so that they are less reliant solely on what senior leaders tell them.

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

Yours sincerely

Linda Killman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, the early years leader and subject leaders for English, mathematics, computing, history and geography. We discussed the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, the school's internal evaluation of its performance, plans for future improvement and information about current pupils' learning.
- You and I observed teaching and learning in all classes. We looked at a sample of the work in disadvantaged pupils' English and mathematics books.
- The school's safeguarding arrangements, records, files and documentation were examined. Discussions were held with the designated safeguarding leads.
- I met with the chair of the governing body and three other governors.
- The views of 46 parents who responded to Parent View, eight staff who completed Ofsted's staff questionnaire and 18 pupils who completed the online pupil questionnaire were taken into account.
- I spoke to the school's local authority improvement adviser on the telephone.