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Mrs Nicola O'Connell
Headteacher
Holtsmere End Infant and Nursery School
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Dear Mrs O'Connell

Short inspection of Holtsmere End Infant and Nursery 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 April 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. However, the judgement that the school remains good belies the obvious improvements that have taken place since you took over as headteacher in June 2016. You have very high expectations and an excellent understanding of what constitutes good teaching and learning. Your incisive and accurate observations are key to helping the school to improve quickly.

You are very well supported by the deputy headteacher and the special educational needs coordinator. Together, you form an efficient and effective senior leadership team. You share the same ambition for the school's continual improvement, and are already having an impact on raising expectations of what pupils can and should achieve.

The school's governors are committed and supportive. As with the senior leadership team, they share your ambition for improving the school. Recent changes to the governing body mean that some governors, including the chair and vice-chair, are new to their roles. This lack of experience means that their knowledge and understanding in some areas is limited. For example, governors do not understand the school's assessment information well enough to be able to hold you and the school's other leaders to account effectively.

You have got to know the school well in the relatively short time you have been in post. Your self-evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is largely

accurate. You have developed an appropriate school development plan, but aspects of this could be strengthened in order for it to be a more useful document for governors to use to hold the school's leaders to account. For example, making targets more sharply focused, including information about how successful outcomes will be measured and the timescales to show when they should have been achieved, would make it much easier for governors to see whether leaders are taking appropriate and effective action.

Pupils behave very well at Holtsmere because teachers' expectations are high and the new behaviour system is used effectively. Routines are established well so that pupils know what is expected of them and what they are supposed to do at different points in the day. Strong relationships between staff and pupils are a particular strength. Pupils enjoy school because teachers give them interesting things to do and they make learning fun.

Parents are very positive about the school. Of the parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, 98% said that they would recommend the school to others. Many parents were positive in their written responses to the survey such as, 'My child is very happy at the school and I am happy as a parent with the school and all it provides.' Another parent said that the school: 'has a wonderful community feeling, where parents are welcomed to be engaged in their child's learning and development as much as possible in school life, and participate along with their children in certain activities in the school'. There were no negative comments.

The areas for improvement from the previous inspection focused on writing, improving attendance and developing the outdoor area in the early years to provide more challenge for children. Although there is still work to do in these areas, it is clear that the school has taken appropriate action to address them in the time since the last inspection.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. Appropriate processes are in place to ensure that only suitable people are employed to work with children. All necessary checks are made, and the school's single central record of these checks meets statutory requirements.

The school has an appropriately high focus on child protection. Staff are alert to the early signs of neglect and abuse and, as a result, actions are put in place when necessary. For example, the special educational needs coordinator regularly attends meetings with other professionals, and parents, in order to ensure that appropriate support is put in place for families who need it.

Inspection findings

- In order to check whether the school remains good, I followed a number of lines

of enquiry. The first was whether current disadvantaged pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. I chose to look at this area because this group of pupils did not achieve as well as other pupils by the time they reached the end of Year 2 in 2016. Similarly, a smaller proportion of disadvantaged children reached a good level of development by the end of Reception than non-disadvantaged children.

- You and the deputy headteacher monitor the progress that this group of pupils makes very carefully. You have very high expectations for all the pupils in the school and disadvantaged pupils are no exception. Current disadvantaged pupils overall are making good progress. Where a very few individual pupils are not making good progress, you know who they are and precisely why this is the case. Although there are reasons why some pupils are making slower progress, you do not allow these reasons to become excuses.
- The second area that I explored is whether pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. Again, the progress of this group of pupils is tracked and monitored accurately and well. Overall, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. Where progress is less strong, there are clear and justifiable reasons for this.
- The next area that I looked at is the progress that children make during their time in early years. The proportion of children who reach a good level of development has remained steady over the last three years but has not kept pace with improvements nationally so remains below the national average. In 2016, outcomes for boys lagged behind those of girls.
- On average, children enter the Reception Year with skills and abilities that are below those typical of their age. Not all children who attend the school's Nursery go on to join the main school. Some children move into the Reception classes as the school year progresses so have less time in early years than others. It is clear that children make good progress from their lower starting points. There is no difference in outcomes for boys and girls this year.
- The teaching of early writing skills is not as effective as it could be. Too few children make rapid progress in learning the rudiments of writing in early years, and this limits the proportion of children who can be considered to have reached a good level of development. You are already aware of this relative weakness and have put measures in place to improve it. For example, you arranged for an adviser from the local authority to work with staff on ways to develop early writing. Changes have already been made in response to this advice but it is too soon to see its impact on children's progress.
- The final issue that I looked at was whether any groups of pupils are disadvantaged by low attendance. I chose to look at this because the last available published data shows that attendance is below the national average. It also shows that the absence rate of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is in the highest 10% of schools nationally. Improving attendance was an area for development after the last inspection.
- Although attendance remains below the national average, there is a clear upward trend. You and the school's office manager track and monitor pupils' attendance

very closely. A long list of measures is in place to both encourage good attendance and address absence. In the most part, these are successful and individual attendance is improving. However, you are, quite rightly, continuing to find ways to address low attendance for the small number of pupils whose rate of absence is too high.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- improve the quality of teaching of early writing so that more children make rapid progress in this area and, in turn, a higher proportion of children reach a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year
- take all necessary measures to ensure that attendance continues to improve so that it is at least in line with the national average
- improve the school's action plan so that governors are better able to hold leaders to account by ensuring that it:
 - focuses sharply on targets
 - includes information about how successful outcomes will be measured
 - has clear timescales to show when key points in each focus area will be reached.

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

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders and a group of governors. I spoke with other pupils during the day and listened to some of them read. I spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone. I took into account the 44 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, 23 responses to the staff survey and 25 responses to the pupil survey. I observed teaching and learning in lessons jointly with you, and looked at pupils' exercise books. I scrutinised a range of school documents.