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Mrs Sandy McClelland
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs McClelland

Short inspection of Holmer Green Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 14 March 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 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 and the perceptive deputy headteacher form an effective partnership. Together you have developed a strong and motivated team of staff who strive to achieve the best for the pupils and families of Holmer Green. Your evaluation of the school's effectiveness shows that you know exactly which aspects of the school require further improvement. The school development plan addresses these well and your swift action has been successful in bringing about improvement.

Parents describe the school as a 'lovely community school'. They comment enthusiastically on the friendly atmosphere and how approachable all of the staff are. The breakfast club provides a safe and secure start to the school day. A range of stimulating activities is available for pupils with a varied and healthy breakfast choice. Helpfully, parents are actively encouraged to come into school regularly to read with children and join in with other activities. Many parents welcome this opportunity to share learning with their children. Through nurturing individuals and supporting families, you ensure that all pupils achieve well and leave the school ready for the next stage of their education.

Pupils are excited when talking about their school, especially mathematics lessons. They speak with pride about the responsibilities they have been given, including

being part of the 'H Team' and taking responsibility for tidying up and helping other pupils in the playground. In classrooms, pupils concentrate and work hard. They are keen to talk about their learning and are proud of their achievements and their progress. Pupils in different classes were eager to show me the 'chocolate' cakes they had made in the mud kitchen, their best writing, and accurately labelled diagrams of their teeth. Pupils achieve well, but occasionally tasks do not build sufficiently well on previous learning.

At the time of the previous inspection, leaders were asked to accelerate the rates of progress by providing more opportunities for pupils to write in subjects other than English. Since then, the leadership team has developed a lively curriculum that motivates pupils to write well. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' writing in all subject areas and pupils' workbooks show that they are making good progress in this aspect. The use of pupil premium funding is well targeted and is carefully documented. As a result, disadvantaged pupils of all ages and abilities achieve similarly to their classmates and other pupils nationally in all subjects.

In 2016, too few pupils in Year 1 met the expected standard for their age in phonics. You ensured that the school's leaders took swift action to address this. Phonics sessions now take place every day and all staff have undertaken valuable additional phonics training. Information on pupils' performance is gathered regularly and is discussed by leaders and staff. This information is used to make changes to planned activities and groupings that benefit pupils and improve progress. The school's current assessment information shows that pupils in Year 1 are on track to meet the expected phonics standard at the end of the year. This information also indicates that pupils in Year 2, who were unsuccessful last year, are on track to achieve the expected standard this year.

The previous inspection report recommended that teachers plan activities that stretch the most able pupils and make them think hard for themselves. During my visit, I saw the most able pupils in Year 2 being challenged to write noun phrases and use conjunctions. Even when they found this difficult, they did not give up, instead asking for advice from friends or using dictionaries to help. Mathematics books show that the most able pupils tackle a range of reasoning and fraction challenges with growing success. However, in writing some of the most able do not achieve as highly as they should.

Governors are knowledgeable about the school and ambitious for pupils' achievement. They can identify where pupil attainment is below the national averages. They talk knowledgeably about the recent changes that the leadership team have put in place. They have welcomed the decisive action taken by the leadership team to improve phonics teaching and to raise expectations in writing. Governors recognise that they need to monitor robustly the impact of these changes on pupils' progress, in order to hold leaders fully to account.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders make sure that all safeguarding processes are fit for purpose and up to date. A well-managed training programme ensures that all staff, governors and volunteers follow the latest guidance. Administrative staff complete and clearly record all appropriate employment checks and you check these regularly.

The designated safeguarding leaders work closely with other agencies to ensure that pupils are safe and families are supported in an appropriate and sensitive manner. Comprehensive records are kept of this work. You give dedicated time during staff meetings to raise awareness of vulnerable pupils. This leads to a consistent approach in addressing their needs. You work hard to ensure that all parents are included positively in their children's education. The overwhelming majority of parents who participated in the parent survey agreed that their children were safe at Holmer Green. One commented, 'Children are nurtured and cared for.'

Attendance is good for most pupils and is above the national average for primary schools. This is because effective processes ensure that pupils' absence is investigated thoroughly and lateness is recorded and followed up by staff. Consequently, persistent absence has decreased for all groups of pupils. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe in school, at home and online. Pupils said that they enjoy school, feel safe and are encouraged to look after their own health and well-being.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision, including pupils' progress in writing, the effectiveness of phonics teaching and the curriculum in the early years. We also considered the impact of leaders' actions on improving pupils' outcomes more widely and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.
- Following the publication of some disappointing results in 2016, you and the deputy headteacher took prompt, effective action to ensure that more pupils are on track to meet the phonics standard at the end of Year 1 in 2017. In order to improve pupils' learning, the leadership team provided valuable tailored support to all staff who teach phonics sessions. As a result, teachers, teaching assistants and learning support assistants show good skills and subject knowledge. They provide pupils with interesting activities that promote learning well and secure good progress.
- In the early years, there is a clear emphasis on establishing sound reading skills. Phonics lessons are well matched to children's different abilities. The most able children are challenged and supported well to read 'tricky words' and distinguish between real words and made up words. Children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported and work at a speed that enables them to consolidate their knowledge securely before moving on. In the afternoon, I saw how this effective teaching enabled children to write information books about princesses and baby farm animals. As a result, children could read

their own writing confidently and were beginning to think of ways to improve it.

- Children in the early years select activities with confidence and enthusiasm. They are supported appropriately by the environment, both indoors and outdoors, which is arranged well, with resources helpfully made easily accessible for the children to use. For example, children enjoyed practising throwing and catching, making 'chocolate' mud pies and constructing big towers. However, it was noticeable that staff did not consistently challenge pupils to make equally wide use of these opportunities. In particular, some girls gravitated indoors, restricting their choices and therefore their opportunities to learn.
- You have made beneficial changes to the teaching of writing in key stage 1. The whole-school focus on handwriting and presentation is having a positive impact. Some pupils have made rapid progress in these areas and pupils' workbooks reflect the care and thought that pupils put into their writing. Pupils are rightly proud of their writing in all areas of the curriculum and are building up skills and stamina. Pupils are keen to edit their work. They successfully develop skills to identify their own errors and make changes independently to improve their writing. However, some of the most able pupils are not challenged well to enrich their vocabulary, so they struggle at times to express themselves fully in writing.
- In key stage 1, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points. Staff, including teaching assistants and learning support assistants, have a detailed knowledge of the pupils' specific needs. This enables them to provide focused, effective support in the classroom and on the playground at the same time as encouraging independence. You and your staff carefully monitor these pupils' progress and support is refined appropriately to accelerate rates of progress.
- The leadership team have put in place effective measures to ensure that a growing group of pupils who speak English as an additional language are well supported and ready to learn. Pre-teaching of specific vocabulary and concepts that will be taught the following week ensures that this group can access learning along with their peers. As a result, pupils who speak English as an additional language are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they rigorously monitor assessment information to evaluate the impact of leaders' actions on pupils' progress and attainment
- the most able writers are challenged consistently well to expand their vocabulary and use this effectively in their writing
- in the early years, adults ensure that all groups of children are challenged and supported equally well, to learn from the full range of opportunities made available to 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 Buckinghamshire. This letter

will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tracy Good
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the deputy headteacher and three governors. I visited all classes, all jointly with you and the deputy headteacher, to look at teaching and learning. I examined pupils' work in their workbooks. I listened to three Year 2 pupils read and, while visiting breakfast club, I spoke informally to pupils. I analysed a range of school documentation including minutes of the governing body meetings, the school development plan, leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. I took into account 76 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and spoke to some parents of children in the early years. I also considered responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.