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Miss Kellie Brazier
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Brazier

Short inspection of Hillcroft Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 26 April 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in January 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 senior leaders, most having started their roles in September 2016, have implemented robust policies and procedures that have enabled you to examine different aspects of the school. Your leadership team is thorough in the analysis of the school's strengths and areas for development. As a result, your self-evaluation is accurate and your plans for school improvement are clear. This has ensured a rapid improvement in pupils' achievement this school year.

You have created a staff team that is determined to do the best for all the pupils in the school. There were eight new teachers at the start of the academic year. You have invested in effective induction and training. Consequently, you have set high aspirations, improved the systems for monitoring the progress of pupils and have ensured good support for those pupils at risk of falling behind. You have a close working partnership with the governing body. Governors hold you to account well and regularly visit the school to check in detail how it is doing.

Pupils behave well in class, as they move around the school and in the playground. They have positive attitudes to lessons and enjoy school. One parent said: 'Our daughter has flourished. She quite literally skips into school and loves learning.' Pupils thrive in the 'Tree House'. This additional provision is expertly led, ensuring that pupils who find learning in large groups difficult receive very effective, individual guidance. These pupils develop academically and personally as a result of

this intensive and highly effective support. Pupils throughout the school listen carefully to staff and other pupils in lessons and they are usually interested and excited by the work that they do. The broad and balanced curriculum is enriched well by many extra-curricular activities, visitors and trips to places of interest. As one parent said, 'They are always having people in.' These activities make a good contribution to pupils' enjoyment of school.

You have taken effective action to address the areas for development identified at the time of the last inspection. Leaders have created a clear improvement plan that includes precise times when checks are required to confirm that improvements have had the desired impact. Pupils use good-quality books and resources that support learning well. They write high-quality pieces of work without needing support from staff, and are able to find things out for themselves in a wide range of subjects.

Although pupils achieve well in mathematics, they make less progress than they do in reading and writing. Assessment information and work in pupils' books shows that standards are rising in mathematics because there has been a greater focus on problem-solving. This is still in its early stages, and so is not yet embedded enough to evaluate fully its impact on pupils' achievement. Different groups of pupils make good progress in English, mathematics and other subjects, including art and history. Occasionally, the level of challenge is not as high as it needs to be for the most able pupils. This means that some most-able pupils do not make as much progress from their starting points as others.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong safeguarding culture at the school. Rigorous checks are carried out on adults before they are allowed to start working or volunteering at the school. The single central record is well maintained and up to date. You ensure that staff receive regular safeguarding training. Staff understand their responsibilities and are quick to report any concerns to the school's designated safeguarding leaders. The school's records show that all concerns are rigorously followed up. Regular meetings take place between the key personnel in school to review how well vulnerable pupils are doing and if there are any further ways they can be supported. You ensure that the curriculum provides pupils with the necessary skills to keep themselves safe, including when online.

Inspection findings

- My first key line of enquiry explored how well the school is helping boys to reach a good level of development by the end of the early years. Teachers plan and deliver interesting and engaging lessons that help all children make rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Staff ask probing questions to check the depth of understanding. They assess learning accurately and provide helpful guidance to children as they complete tasks.
- Well-organised indoor and outdoor learning environments capture boys' interests so that they are keen to learn. Relationships are strong and skilled practitioners know how to move children's learning on, including through play. Staff's good

knowledge of what children understand and can do ensures that they carefully plan next steps in learning. This means that boys quickly learn new skills and develop further those already learned but not fully grasped. Consequently, standards are rising fast.

- Another line of enquiry was how well the school is ensuring that progress in reading is rapid for low prior-attaining pupils, especially for disadvantaged pupils. These pupils progress well, reading with confidence and fluency. They make good use of their phonics knowledge to sound out unfamiliar words and take account of punctuation to add expression when reading aloud. They talked knowledgeably to me about the style of books they like and enjoyed discussing a wide range of authors.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieve well in reading. These pupils are a high priority in school and teachers know that they are accountable for the progress of disadvantaged pupils in their class. The regular pupil progress meetings which staff have with leaders always include a focus on this group of pupils. The impact of the teaching of reading, and any support or intervention they receive, is accurately evaluated in terms of how well disadvantaged pupils progress. The meetings also check how effectively pupils apply their reading skills across the curriculum.
- I also investigated the actions that leaders are taking to improve pupils' skills in mathematics, especially for the high prior-attaining group and disadvantaged pupils. You identified mathematics as an urgent priority for improvement and the actions you and the mathematics leader have instigated have been successful. Staff training has ensured that teachers are better prepared to teach the more exacting content of the new mathematics national curriculum. Pupils make good progress and can manipulate numbers effectively. However, they do not routinely apply what they know to solve problems. Leaders have rightly identified that in order to improve their mathematical skills, pupils need more practice in problem-solving.
- Leaders allocate pupil premium funding to agreed priorities and monitor its impact closely. They have a good overview of how the funding is spent and the positive effect it is having on the progress of disadvantaged pupils in mathematics. Current assessment information and work seen in books indicate that these pupils are making rapid progress in mathematics because tasks are challenging. For example, in Year 4 pupils quickly made progress in understanding the commutative properties of number when articulating and explaining its meaning. Pupils who are falling behind are identified quickly and given the help they need.
- My final line of enquiry was evaluating how effectively the school is tackling low attendance rates. I also focused on persistent absence and fixed-term exclusions for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders and staff have used a range of effective strategies to improve attendance. Pupils are rewarded for regular and improved attendance. The school's family liaison officer has engaged well with families to improve attendance and punctuality, including for disadvantaged pupils. As a result, rates of attendance for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational

needs and/or disabilities have now improved and are in line with last year's national averages.

- Senior leaders monitor persistent absence carefully. You identify what the barriers are to regular attendance for individual pupils and provide families with well-focused and individual support. The local authority educational welfare officer is also involved in following up persistent absences. As a result, the proportion of pupils whose absence rates are too high is decreasing. Evidence shows that the achievement of pupils who now attend more regularly is improving. However, you remain vigilant in keeping this under review.
- You have very good provision for pupils who demonstrate challenging behaviour. The 'Tree House' provides a nurturing environment that helps pupils to successfully improve their behaviour, alongside their academic skills, in a small group. Pupils rejoin their class when they are ready to learn in a larger group and when they have caught up in their studies. As a result, fixed-term exclusions are significantly lower than last year, both for disadvantaged pupils and overall.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers develop pupils' mathematical skills by providing them with opportunities to practise and utilise their problem-solving skills
- the most able pupils are consistently provided with sufficient challenge.

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

Yours sincerely

Richard Blackmore
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held discussions with you, the deputy headteacher and assistant headteachers about the school's self-evaluation, the school's progress since the last inspection, and current priorities. I held a meeting with governors and spoke to three representatives from the multi-academy trust. You, the deputy headteacher, and assistant headteachers joined me at different times in visiting classes across the school where we observed the quality of teaching and learning, talked to pupils about their work and looked at their books. I also held a discussion with the English and mathematics leaders. I took into consideration the views of 50 pupils through Ofsted's online pupil survey. I heard pupils read aloud. I evaluated a

range of documents, including the school improvement plan and records about keeping pupils safe. I also considered 43 responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire. The views of parents were considered through the 65 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I also spoke to parents at the end of the school day.