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Miss Lynsey Thompson
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Dear Miss Thompson

Short inspection of Hillside Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 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 October 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 ensure that Hillside Primary School is a delightful place to learn where pupils behave well and take pride in their learning. Right across the school, you cultivate a vibrant and purposeful learning environment. Pupils enjoy their lessons and adults enjoy teaching them. As a result of continued good teaching, coupled with your programme of rich extra-curricular activities and your striking commitment to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, pupils continue to flourish in your care. Without doubt, you educate pupils to be resilient and resourceful individuals. You clearly fulfil your mission to enable pupils to grow and develop 'loving learning, loving life'.

You, your leadership team and the governing body continue to ensure that pupils achieve well at Hillside Primary School. This is because you and your governors have a sharp insight into the quality of education that the school provides. You evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the school with honesty and exactitude. Your school improvement plan reflects precisely the areas for improvement that will improve the quality of education for your pupils. You are not afraid to take calculated risks to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school. You and your leadership team believe that to maintain the status quo is just not acceptable.

One such example of your willingness to make calculated changes is your drive to overhaul the teaching of mathematics. This is so that pupils can make better

progress and achieve to a higher standard. Now your staff ensure that the development of pupils' problem-solving and reasoning skills are at the heart of every mathematics lesson. Problem-solving was a key area for improvement at the previous inspection. Since you have overhauled provision in mathematics, teachers and pupils have a renewed passion for the subject. Pupils say that they love mathematics and teachers describe the 'buzz' in the staffroom as they discuss and debate how best to teach the topics. You acknowledge that now is the time to enhance and embed pupils' skills in reasoning and problem-solving skills in mathematics. This is so that pupils make even more progress and achieve at a higher standard.

Aside from problem-solving, since the previous inspection you have also ensured that the progress made by the least able pupils continues to improve. In 2016, in every subject except writing, the least able pupils made good or better progress, which is a significant improvement. Not content with this, you have insisted that the provision for writing now improves. Across the school, teachers routinely plan resources that support and challenge pupils so that they can achieve well, regardless of their starting points. You have also renewed and reinvigorated teachers' approach to teaching writing because you knew that this was the weakest area, especially for the least able and for boys. Now pupils are inspired to write and they achieve well.

Another improvement priority from the last inspection was to extend learning for the most able pupils. You and your staff have embraced this challenge and the most able pupils achieve above the national average in reading and writing and around the national average in mathematics. Leaders ensure that teachers use effective questioning techniques to stretch and challenge pupils' conceptual understanding. Pupils habitually complete higher-order extension activities in their subject journals. To raise expectations even further, you now ensure that middle-ability pupils are also stretched in the same way as higher prior-attaining pupils.

While provision for the most able and least able has been improved since the previous inspection, you acknowledge that the achievement gap between boys and girls has not yet been eradicated. Until recently, boys have performed less well than girls, especially in the early years and across the school in writing. You recognise that a key priority for leaders is to continue to build on the work that has already been started to diminish the gender gap. Your action plans accurately reflect this and your systems to monitor provision rightly focus on evaluating the impact of your actions to improve the progress and attainment of boys.

One way you have already begun successfully addressing the gender gap is in the early years. You have recently acquired the pre-school because you recognise the importance of supporting the development of your children from a very early age. You and your early years leader are personalising programmes for two- and three-year olds so that gaps in development, particularly for boys and disadvantaged children, close. During the inspection, you acknowledged that, despite the positive changes already made to provision, you still need to accelerate further the progress and development of boys and disadvantaged children in the early years.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, ensure that all policies, procedures and practices in relation to the safeguarding of pupils reflect the most recent developments. Safeguarding records are thorough and it is abundantly evident that no stone is left unturned in your support for vulnerable pupils and their families. You waste no time in sourcing best practice from across the country to ensure that pupils are safe, including by commissioning external audits of your provision. You and your chair of governors regularly undertake health and safety walks of the site to ensure that it is safe and secure. Pupils value the changes that you have made to keep them safe. They particularly enjoy the well-attended breakfast club that helps them to be punctual to school and start the day with a healthy meal. This has rapidly improved pupils' attendance and punctuality. Parents also value this provision and feel that staff really care for their children. They also value the additional information that you provide to them about keeping children safe online.

Inspection findings

- Overall, pupils make similar progress to other pupils nationally by the end of key stage 2. However, disadvantaged pupils and least-able pupils did not make the progress of which they are capable in writing in 2016. Leaders have taken effective action to address this issue. Teachers have evaluated the way in which they teach writing so that it both inspires and motivates pupils to succeed. Resources are now highly effective and pupils' successes in writing are celebrated at every opportunity. Added to this, the teaching of spelling, punctuation and grammar has improved. The school's own information shows convincingly that outcomes in writing are much stronger this year.
- Leaders have highly effective and robust tracking systems that allow them to identify any potential underachievement. Groups of pupils, for example disadvantaged, the most able and the least able, are tracked rigorously. Progress meetings are used effectively to discuss pupil's individual learning journeys. Low-ability and disadvantaged pupils are meticulously monitored so that any gaps in progress or attainment can be identified. Leaders' effective systems are also beginning to close the progress and attainment gap between boys and girls, although this remains a key priority.
- Leaders and governors are taking effective action to improve provision in mathematics so that more pupils achieve a higher standard by the end of key stage 2. Governors have invested heavily in ongoing training for staff so that they can deliver problem-solving and reasoning as the main driver for every mathematics lesson. Pupils work extremely well together to solve increasingly complex mathematical problems. This allows them to add to their toolkit of mathematical language, concepts and processes so that when they arrive at an unfamiliar problem, they have sufficient knowledge, skill and understanding at their disposal. Leaders recognise that now is the time to embed this new way of learning so that pupils can excel.
- In 2016, there was a decline in the proportion of boys and disadvantaged children achieving a good level of development in the early years. This year,

there is now a marked improvement in the development of these children, although there is still more to be done. The school's own information provides robust evidence that over half of the boys are on track to achieve a good level of development. Added to this, two thirds of disadvantaged children are also at the expected standard. Personalised provision in the pre-school and Nursery is also having a positive effect on children's development. Leaders monitor closely the provision to ensure that it addresses any weaknesses, for example, in communication and language and physical development. Leadership of the early years is effective.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they accelerate further the progress and development of boys and disadvantaged children in the early years
- they raise further progress and attainment in mathematics by enhancing and embedding pupils' ability to reason and solve unfamiliar problems
- they build on the strong work already in place to close the achievement gap even further between boys and girls.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Smart
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your acting deputy headteacher, parents of pupils from the school, the early years leaders, subject leaders and members of the governing body. In addition, I met formally with a group of pupils from across the school and talked informally with others around the school and in lessons. I listened to pupils read. Furthermore, I jointly observed teaching and learning in key stages 1 and 2 and visited the early years. I examined a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, attendance information, pupils' assessment information, a range of policies, your evaluation of how well the school is performing and your school improvement plan. I also undertook a review of the school's website. As part of the inspection, I considered four responses to Ofsted's free text service, 60 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire, 17 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and the results of your own parental surveys.