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Mrs Linda Coveney
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Coveney

Short inspection of Kents Hill School

Following my visit to the school on 27 June 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 converted to an academy in 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Kents Hill School continues to go from strength to strength under your calm and assured leadership. Your deputy headteacher supports you well and together you have an accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness; you know what is working well, and what could be even better. Your staff are well-motivated. They are keen to make sure that all pupils make good progress, and enjoy their learning across a stimulating and engaging curriculum. Parents are supportive of the school and many commented on how well you nurture pupils' confidence and self-esteem. One observation, typical of many, was that: 'Kents Hill is a delightful school. My daughter looks forward to going every day. She feels genuinely cared for and has come on in leaps and bounds.'

Pupils enjoy coming to school, and they learn with sparkling enthusiasm. They say that it is a friendly school, and that teachers look after them well. They particularly appreciate the school grounds, and told me how much they enjoyed the many different games and activities that are available at breaktimes. Staff develop positive relationships with pupils and play and interact with them well. As a result, there is a strong sense of community at Kents Hill.

You have worked tirelessly in recent years to improve the school further, taking into

account the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. You have used your accurate evaluations of teaching to develop staff's expertise well and as a result have enhanced the quality of pupils' learning effectively. Middle leaders have clearly defined roles and they fulfil their responsibilities to a good standard. The school continues to improve under your leadership.

Current pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are making good progress. Most children in the early years are well prepared for Year 1. The majority of pupils achieve well in phonics. In key stage 1, a high proportion are making consistently strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders are aware, however, that more needs to be done to be sure a greater proportion of pupils, particularly those who are most able, achieve the higher standards in writing and mathematics of which they are capable.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your team provide a strong culture for keeping children safe at Kents Hill. You systematically record safeguarding information and ensure records are detailed and accurate. All the required checks are made when employing staff, and leaders are appropriately trained in safer recruitment. The single central record of employment checks on staff meets statutory requirements.

All staff receive relevant up-to-date safeguarding information; recently, for example, on well-organised training about female genital mutilation and the 'Prevent' duty. You ensure that other adults not employed by the school, such as cleaners and lunchtime servers, understand what to do and who to speak to if they have any concerns about a pupil. As a result, all staff know what to do to keep children safe.

Pupils learn about e-safety. You recently participated in a national initiative about how to be safe online. Older pupils shared their growing knowledge, and knew the danger of sharing their names and pictures on the internet.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we focused on how leaders ensure that children get off to a good start with their learning in the early years. We also scrutinised how effectively leaders check that the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve well in mathematics and writing. In addition, we evaluated the quality of support provided to pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Lastly, we looked closely at how well leaders prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.
- You ensure that pupils develop their emerging skills well in the early years. The setting is bright, vibrant and exciting, and children participate in their learning with vigour and enthusiasm. Children were keen to share their writing with me, having constructed a string of effective sentences about a farmer feeding his animals. They showed confidence and gusto, and were rightly proud of what they had learned.
- You check carefully that additional adults in the early years support pupils

effectively and enhance good-quality teaching. For example, by using clear, accurate explanations and posing questions carefully to strengthen children's ability to double numbers. Children respond well to this strong support and learn well as a result.

- You have introduced a range of successful initiatives to develop pupils' writing skills. You ensure that pupils read a range of texts and authors, and learn effectively the key characteristics of good writing. In mathematics, based on their starting points, strong teaching helps pupils' confidence and ability to grapple with work that is challenging. In a Year 2 lesson, pupils made good progress tackling an investigation that required them to work through a sequence of addition sums systematically. However, teaching does not consistently generate the accelerated progress which pupils, particularly the most able, are capable of achieving. Leaders are aware of this, but more needs to be achieved to secure the highest outcomes for some pupils.
- Your special educational needs coordinator has strong, relevant professional knowledge. She uses this effectively to ensure that class teaching is adapted as needed for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. She works well with other external care professionals and thoughtfully incorporates their advice to meet the needs of individual pupils. As a result, these pupils receive the tailored support they need to make good progress from their starting points.
- You have provided good-quality training for staff to improve outcomes for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. High-quality speech and language training has strengthened staff's skills to help certain pupils learn more effectively in class. Consequently, the needs of these pupils are met well and they make good progress from their starting points.
- You make sure that pupils develop a good understanding and respect for different faiths and religions. Pupils enthused about their learning of the Jewish observation of Shabbat, and shared their secure knowledge of this important religious observance.
- You enable pupils to learn effectively about British values, such as democracy. When standing for election as school councillors, for instance, pupils prepared speeches so that others could decide who to vote for. Pupils know that the school council is their opportunity to talk to staff about their ideas to improve the school. This contributes well to pupils' growing understanding of British values and, consequently, their preparation for life in modern Britain.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- A greater proportion of pupils, particularly those who are most able, achieve the highest standards, particularly in writing and mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Milton Keynes. This letter

will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Dom Cook
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Together with you, I observed learning across classes in the Nursery, early years and in key stage 1. I spoke to pupils, and examined their work in their exercise books. Meetings were held with senior leaders, including the deputy headteacher and the special educational needs coordinator. I met with two governors, including the chair of the local governing body, and the chief executive officer of the trust. I took into account 32 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 29 written comments. I also analysed 15 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. A range of documents was reviewed, including: the school's development plan, leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness, the school's single central record of recruitment checks made on staff, information about pupils' achievement, records of pupils' behaviour and attendance, and minutes of meetings held by governors.