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Mrs Jo Leishman
Principal
Highgate Primary Academy
Nicholas Lane
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Dear Mrs Leishman

Short inspection of Highgate Primary Academy

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 was judged to be good in February 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 are a highly driven principal and are uncompromising in your desire for the school to continually improve. You have created a positive learning culture through your intent to share leadership responsibilities, increase accountability and put pupils' individual needs at the heart of school improvement. As a result, staff morale is high and together you take collective responsibility for pupils' outcomes.

Leaders' relentless pursuit for developing the school further has meant that the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been tackled with rigour. For example, pupils make extensive use of information technology to support their learning and this is now a strength of the school. Improving the quality of teaching has been a particular focus for leaders. Leaders make very thorough checks on teaching and learning and this is supporting them in identifying training needs and areas for development for each individual member of staff. The effective systems you have established for supporting teachers to continually develop are resulting in improving pupil outcomes over time.

Pupils make strong progress in English and mathematics through their time in school. Pupils often enter school with skills, knowledge and understanding that are lower than the starting points typical of their age. By the end of Reception in 2016, the proportion who reached a good level of development was in line with the

national average. At the end of key stage 1, pupils' attainment was just above that seen nationally in writing and mathematics and was in line with national figures for reading. Progress in writing and mathematics in 2016 at key stage 2 was above average whereas reading progress was broadly in line with the national average. You identified this relative weakness and actions taken have resulted in achievement in reading now being more in line with that found in writing and mathematics. You acknowledge that teachers need to have consistently high expectations of the quality and presentation of pupils' work to enable even more pupils to reach the highest standards.

Pupils are encouraged to be fully involved in the life of the school, which gives them a sense of purpose and responsibility. They take on roles, such as reading ambassadors, and are proud of the support they provide for younger pupils or in the local community through the Highgate difference award. The award inspires and motivates Year 6 pupils to think about planning for their future. They do this with great confidence and enthusiasm and are developing as responsible citizens and confident learners as a result.

The multi-academy trust has recently been reorganised and new governance arrangements have been introduced. A local governing board has been newly formed and is beginning to establish effective ways of working. At present, however, in these early stages of the transition, governors are not yet holding school leaders to account with enough rigour. They are keen to become more directly involved in the life of the school and take on particular areas of responsibility to enable them to challenge from a position of greater knowledge. Leaders make good use of the links with other schools within the trust, for example, to develop the reliability and accuracy of teacher assessment judgments. You have increased leadership capacity within the school through training and recruitment. However, you acknowledge that the next step in developing leadership further is to increase the impact that subject leaders have on improving standards in the wider curriculum, beyond English and mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have established a highly vigilant culture of safeguarding. You are ably supported by the family liaison officer and together you have ensured that record keeping and systems to protect children are robust. As a result, staff take safeguarding seriously and treat it as everyone's responsibility. The training they receive supports them in being able to recognise and respond to any signs of concern. Leaders' rigorous checks mean that patterns are spotted quickly and action is taken to address any issues which arise.

Pupils behave very well and say there is rarely any bullying. They feel safe and well cared for in school and parents agree. The curriculum provides countless opportunities to support children in being safe. Consequently, pupils talk confidently about how to stay safe online and what they would do if someone was being unkind to them at school.

Inspection findings

- Reading attainment at key stage 2 in 2016 was just below the national average and progress was broadly in line with average. Whereas, in writing and mathematics, attainment and progress were above the national average. The vice-principal, as English leader, took prompt action to raise the profile of reading throughout the school. Reading leaders and reading ambassadors promote reading in classes and organise the library and events such as world book day. Leaders introduced a new approach to the teaching of guided reading, which involves staff in using highly focused questioning linked to the expectations for each year group. As a result of leaders' actions, current pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are now making more rapid progress with their reading and a greater proportion are now working above age-related expectations. Attainment and progress overall are now more in line with that seen in writing and mathematics. You are rightly aware that the next development in the teaching of guided reading is in having consistently high expectations for all groups of pupils and not just those working with staff. This will ensure that pupils take pride in producing work of high quality with neat presentation, even when working independently.
- Although pupils have high attainment and make good progress in writing, leaders have accurately identified that grammar and spelling are the relatively weaker aspects. The vice-principal has been instrumental in guiding and supporting staff in making accurate assessments and helping them gain a secure understanding of the expectations for each year group. The teaching of writing is enabling teachers to weave the teaching of spelling and grammar into the unit of learning. The impact of spelling and grammar activities can be seen in the way pupils are now using their newly acquired skills in subsequent pieces of work. For example, following exploration of words with a similar meaning to dangerous, a pupil chose the word 'treacherous' in the next piece of writing. Current pupils in Year 6 are on track for an increased proportion to meet the expected standard in the grammar, punctuation and spelling test this year. Increasing proportions of disadvantaged pupils are reaching age-related expectations as they move through the school. This confirms that the difference is diminishing between their attainment and that of other pupils nationally over time. You are aware that pupils' work sometimes varies in the pride and care taken with presentation and handwriting. Additionally, spelling errors sometimes go unchecked meaning that pupils continue to incorrectly spell high-frequency words. This is holding back the rate of progress for some pupils.
- An interesting curriculum and the development of pupils' resilience and perseverance begin in the early years where a wide range of resources and experiences contribute well to children's progress and development. Children in the early years demonstrate high levels of motivation and concentration. An increasing proportion of children are now exceeding the early learning goals, particularly in the aspects of learning which have been a focus of leaders' improvement, for example, technology. Pupils continue to enjoy the curriculum experiences and opportunities throughout their time in school and talk about their learning with passion. The vibrant curriculum is focused on broadening pupils' experiences and helping them develop as confident individuals who are

more able to contribute to society. It is successful in helping to prepare pupils for the next stage of their education and life beyond. However, standards achieved in subjects beyond English and mathematics are not consistently as high, as teaching is not always appropriately focused on developing subject-specific skills. Leadership of some of these subjects is in the earlier stages of development. Leaders are becoming more aware of expectations in their subjects and the next step will be for subject leaders to take increasing responsibility for further raising standards in their subjects.

- Whole-school strategies are effectively promoting the importance of good attendance. Leadership of attendance has been rigorous over the last year and has resulted in improved attendance and reduced persistent absence, including for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. There is a relentless drive to make improvements and effective use has been made of pupil premium funding. Where identified, the family liaison officer uses a tailored approach, including the support of external agencies, to improve attendance for specific individuals. The current focus on promoting attendance of the youngest pupils in school is an example of the desire to continue improving this aspect of the school's work further.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the newly formed governing board establishes rigorous systems to effectively hold school leaders to account
- subject leaders, particularly in foundation subjects, are developed further and take increased responsibility for raising standards in their subjects
- teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils' handwriting, spelling and the general presentation of their work.

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

Yours sincerely

Kirsty Godfrey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the vice-principal, the early years leader, the director of education from the multi-academy trust and the chair of the governing board. I evaluated documentation, including the school's self-evaluation,

the school development plan, information about pupils' progress, performance management information, governing board minutes, attendance records and information about safeguarding. I spoke with several parents at the start of the school day and considered nine responses from Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I met with a group of pupils from a range of year groups and heard several pupils read. You and I visited every classroom together to observe teaching and learning and scrutinise pupils' work in books.