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Miss Hannah Nash
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Nash

Short inspection of Kents Hill Junior 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 was judged to be good in July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection and continues to improve.

You took over the role of headteacher in June 2016, following your promotion from deputy headteacher. You have wasted no time in communicating a clear plan for everyone to succeed. You have successfully focused on maintaining and improving the quality of education so that pupils can progress both personally and academically. Currently, you are building a strong leadership team and are ably supported by your two assistant headteachers.

Staff are proud to work at Kents Hill Junior school. One comment typified the ethos of the school well, 'All members of the school community support each other to ensure pupils' well-being and progress is at the centre of everything we do.'

I was impressed by the wealth of good-quality displays around the school that demonstrate pupils' achievements. Pupils enjoy spending time with their favourite books in your recently introduced reading garden.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have rightly focused on ensuring that the quality of teaching is at least good throughout the school, and you have continued and brought added momentum. Evidence from your own monitoring, work in pupils' exercise books and assessment information confirm that this is the case, particularly

in writing and in mathematics. I also saw evidence of the most able pupils being challenged appropriately in their learning in mathematics, for example.

Pupils enjoy the opportunities to learn a variety of subjects through the interesting short courses you provide as part of their curriculum provision. Subjects such as computing, music and Spanish are taught through these half-termly courses. The quality of pupils' work in the computer programming short course is impressive. One parent commented that her child 'enjoys the variety of the short courses and the friendly ethos of the school'.

Pupils conduct themselves well around the school. Your behaviour records show that pupils' good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning are consistently the norm. Pupils understand and willingly follow the high expectations that you and your staff set. Many pupils spoke positively with me about the 'learning zones' and how they work. They are very proud of the many rewards they receive for good behaviour and demonstrate strong, positive attitudes towards their learning. Your records show that the number of incidents where your high standards of behaviour are not met are diminishing over time.

You are held to account very well by an enthusiastic and dedicated governing body. They are ably led by an experienced chair of governors. Governors are skilled, supportive and challenging of the school's work. They visit frequently to check that pupils have the opportunity to make as much progress as possible. Minutes of meetings demonstrate that governors ask relevant questions and have a clear understanding of the standard of education that you provide.

Most parents who responded to the online questionnaire agree that their children are happy and well looked after. However, parents have more mixed views about how well leaders respond to their concerns. Many are appreciative, and one comment expressed the sentiments of a number of parental responses to the freetext service: 'I believe the current headteacher has worked hard to improve the school.' Leaders and governors recognise that there is still more work to do to communicate effectively with parents so that more understand the highly positive work of the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

You place the highest priority on keeping pupils safe and providing strong pastoral care for them. All staff who responded to their online questionnaire agreed that pupils are kept safe. Pupils spoken with, and most of those who responded to their questionnaire, could identify a trusted adult whom they would speak with in school if they were worried. As safety is one of your school values, pupils are rewarded for looking after themselves and others in a safe environment.

Leaders, including governors, have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Meticulous records are organised consistently and effectively. Governors regularly check that safeguarding and child protection practice in school

is rigorous.

Policies for safeguarding and child protection have been updated and are in line with current guidance from the department for education. Staff and governors receive good-quality safeguarding training, with leaders providing additional relevant information through staff meetings. Leaders review practices annually and ensure that clear action plans are followed so that all staff remain up to date.

Parents' views are mixed regarding how well leaders deal with issues of bullying in school. Inspection evidence showed little evidence that these concerns are well founded. I examined the records that leaders keep regarding issues of behaviour and potential bullying, and this evidence confirms that leaders deal effectively with any reported incidents of bullying.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was to consider how well pupils progress in reading. This was because in 2016, the progress pupils made in reading was below the national average. In 2015, pupils' progress in reading, although in line with the national average, was below the progress they made in writing and mathematics.
- At the start of this academic year you rightly identified the need to improve the progress pupils make in reading. You have successfully changed the way reading is taught, and pupils now receive regular lessons to improve their comprehension skills. Year 6 pupils are on track to achieve well in their tests this year.
- Pupils read well. You have placed a great deal of emphasis on improving pupils' enjoyment of reading. The recently developed reading garden has been welcomed by pupils and parents. Pupils who read to me during the inspection were fluent and used expression and intonation effectively. Younger pupils are still using their knowledge of sounds to help them when they come across unfamiliar words. You recognise that some aspects of reading are not yet as secure, and you continue to develop the reading bands further. You are also introducing a wider range of texts for your younger readers.
- Another area I considered was the progress that girls make in mathematics. This was because in 2016, the progress that girls made in mathematics was less strong than that of the boys by the end of Year 6.
- In many year groups you are focusing on the progress that boys make, to ensure that there is no gender issue in pupils' achievement. Evidence from pupils' mathematics books demonstrates that boys and girls make similarly strong progress in mathematics across the school.
- You carefully monitor the progress that each pupil makes so that you keep a close check on any pupil who may fall behind. Your in-school information, together with pupils' work in their exercise books, demonstrates that pupils make good progress in mathematics. The feedback that teachers provide, both verbally and in written form, is precise and helps pupils of all abilities make the progress of which they are capable.

- Your chosen approach to teaching mathematics is secure and pupils are developing their reasoning skills well. The girls I spoke with during the inspection were able to explain their methods and reasoning well. Pupils work diligently in lessons to complete their activities and practise their skills. You and your team ensure that individual needs are well met, though you recognise that some recent changes in Year 3 still require some refining so that the most able pupils make better progress.
- My third line of enquiry was regarding the achievement of boys in grammar, punctuation and spelling, particularly at the higher standard. This was because in both 2016 and 2015, the proportion of boys who reached the higher standard was lower than girls.
- You had already identified spelling as an issue to improve across the school. Your new approach is proving successful in raising the standard of spelling in pupils' written work. Teachers are effective at identifying misconceptions that pupils may have, and evidence in books shows that pupils improve as a result. From a scrutiny of pupils' work, there was no significant difference between the outcomes of boys and girls in their use of grammar and spelling for most year groups.
- However, although the gap in achievement between boys and girls is closing in spelling, in Year 6 your in-school information shows that girls are still set to out-perform boys in grammar, punctuation and spelling at the end of key stage 2.
- Together, we considered the quality of education across the curriculum. This was to check how well groups of pupils such as the most-able, disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve in subjects other than mathematics and English.
- The school has a unique and exciting chosen approach to the delivery of the curriculum. Pupils participate in short courses that take place throughout the school year, for half a term. For example, pupils learn to play the viola, or participate in Spanish lessons or develop their programming skills on computers. Pupils very much enjoy these opportunities to acquire and practise different skills.
- The effectiveness of leadership in subjects other than English and mathematics is still in early stages. Middle leaders are developing their approach to measuring the progress that pupils make during a short course from their starting points. You recognise that this is not yet fully in place.
- Pupils' books illustrate that in some subjects, such as history and geography, pupils could make better progress. At times, they all complete the same worksheets, which limits the progress that the most able pupils are able to make. You have recently introduced more writing across the curriculum and, in the older year groups, pupils are using their literacy skills to good effect.
- The final area I explored was how you are improving the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This was because in 2016, the attendance for this significant group of pupils was in the lowest 10% nationally and their persistent absenteeism was in the highest 10% nationally.
- Your inclusion manager carefully and rigorously tracks the attendance of

individuals who fall below your high expectations for attending. As a result, attendance overall continues to be just above the national average. You appropriately use both support and challenge to help those parents who may find engaging with school a difficulty. As a result, persistent absenteeism for some individuals is reducing, but you acknowledge that more needs to be done to ensure that no group is disadvantaged by poor attendance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- Subject leaders use assessment information more precisely to accelerate pupils' progress in all subjects across the curriculum.
- The attendance of significant groups continues to improve towards the national average.
- Make sure that the good and positive work of the school is communicated as well as possible to parents.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the assistant headteachers, the inclusion manager, the school office personnel, the chair of governors and four other representatives of the governing body, one of whom holds a joint role on the board of the multi-academy trust, and the executive headteacher.
- I gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included observations of teaching and learning in every class, jointly with you. Together, we scrutinised pupils' current work across all subjects and a wide range of abilities.
- I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including your self-evaluation, the school's termly plans for improvement, a sample of assessment information, governors' minutes of meetings and documents relating to attendance.

- I spoke informally with pupils during lessons and listened to a number of older and younger pupils read.
- Policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils were examined, including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff and case studies about referrals made to external agencies. A discussion was held with you as the designated safeguarding lead.
- I took account of the 48 parent responses that were provided during the inspection time, to the online survey, Parent View, together with the 30 freetext comments.
- The views of staff were considered from 17 responses to the staff online questionnaire.
- The views of 12 pupils who responded to their questionnaire were considered along with the comments provided over the course of the inspection.