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Mr Andrew Palmer  
Headteacher  
Heycroft Primary School  
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Dear Mr Palmer

### **Short inspection of Heycroft Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 5 July 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 June 2013.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The school has maintained stable leadership and governance, including the same headteacher and the same chair of governors, since its previous inspection. You have invested effectively in the training of staff, supported by colleagues from the local authority, and you have strengthened your senior leadership team with the appointment of new subject leaders. The results of national tests at the end of key stage 2 in 2016 signalled a dramatic dip in outcomes for pupils. However, you and the governing body took swift action to address the situation and, as a result, the attainment and progress of pupils, including pupils at the end of key stage 2, have improved.

You bring a calm and caring approach to your work, which parents, staff and governors all recognise and appreciate. Parents I spoke to informally at the start of the day were generous in their praise for the school. Typical of the comments made were, 'This is a lovely school with a friendly, family atmosphere,' and 'My children really enjoy coming to school, they are happy here and really well cared for.'

Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school, showing respect to staff and visitors and concentrating hard when they are working. Pupils enjoy their lessons because teachers make learning interesting and ensure that pupils understand how to succeed in their work. The vast majority of pupils attend school regularly and arrive punctually, eager to start their day. Breakfast club and after-school childcare are well organised, with lots of activities such as board games and construction toys which pupils thoroughly enjoy.

You have worked closely with your leadership team and with governors to ensure that a good standard of education has been maintained and this year has improved. You are extremely well supported by your deputy and together you provide effective leadership and a firm desire to consolidate the improvements you continue to make. Subject leaders, especially leaders responsible for reading, writing and mathematics, have been given more opportunities to support teachers and check the quality of teaching. This has been a significant factor in recent improvements in pupils' outcomes.

You are fully aware of the areas which still need to be improved. You have plans in place to ensure that pupils do better in spelling, so that recent variations in grammar, punctuation and spelling results are eliminated. You have a strong focus on improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. You also recognise the value of sharing the best examples of high-quality teaching, both internally at the school and in collaboration with other schools locally. We agreed that these are critical in order to build upon recent improvements in teaching. You are determined to ensure that every teacher plans for a high level of challenge in lessons and demonstrates the highest expectations about what pupils can achieve. This work needs to continue. You have a clear plan for continuing to improve the school, which you review regularly.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that procedures to recruit new staff are rigorous.

You maintain pupils' safeguarding records carefully and ensure that staff are trained to spot and quickly record any concerns. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities and are quick to respond to any potential risk. All required recruitment checks are in place.

The pupils I spoke with around the school told me that they feel safe at school. They consider bullying and bad behaviour to be rare events and they are confident that adults will listen to them if they have concerns. Helping pupils to keep themselves safe is woven through the curriculum. For example, the ongoing safer internet work reminds pupils about how to stay safe online and pupils talked knowledgeably to me about what they had learned.

Parents' views are equally positive. An overwhelming majority agree that pupils are safe and well cared for at Heycroft Primary School.

### **Inspection findings**

- To ascertain that the school remained good, one of my key lines of enquiry was about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, particularly in key stage 2. This was because in 2016, outcomes dipped, especially in reading and mathematics. In reading, for example, only 52% of pupils achieved the expected standard, compared with 66% nationally. In mathematics it was 48%, compared

with 70% nationally. You agreed, and told me that your leadership team had been aware that a significant drop in outcomes had been expected. You and your leaders have analysed the reasons and ensured that you have acted swiftly to rectify the situation for pupils currently on roll in key stage 2.

- When we observed teaching across the school, we saw examples of the impact that your work is already having. You have used training effectively to raise teachers' expectations about what pupils will achieve in English and mathematics. You have made good use of opportunities to visit other schools and you have worked closely with local school leaders to ensure that lessons are appropriately challenging.
- Teachers use questioning well in lessons. They identify pupils' understanding effectively, address any misconceptions quickly, and deepen learning once pupils have mastered the basic skills.
- One of your most important improvements has been to introduce regular sessions into each day, where teachers concentrate on improving pupils' key skills. This is having a positive impact on pupils' progress and achievement across the whole school. Teachers feel more confident in their ability to ensure that no child misses out on vital new learning, and that essential skills such as reasoning in mathematics and applying rules in spelling, are practised daily by every pupil.
- Subject leaders, including those who are new to their roles, support your teachers very well. The higher levels of responsibility you have given to subject leaders, combined with the passion, rigour and high levels of knowledge they bring to their work, have had a significant, positive impact on improvements to teaching, particularly since September 2016.
- As a result of these improvements, 2017 provisional pupils' outcomes indicate a dramatic improvement and a raising of standards, particularly in mathematics. From work in pupils' books and also the school's own provisional results, the proportion of pupils who are working at the expected standard or above is more in line with the national average. However, you recognise that more could be achieved in improving pupils' spelling so that more pupils work at the expected standard in grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- My second line of enquiry was about the support you make available to disadvantaged pupils. Over the last three years, disadvantaged pupils' absence rates have been too high, and in 2016, their progress and attainment was much lower than other pupils nationally.
- You have used funding from the pupil premium grant wisely, ensuring that a good range of provision is in place to help families of disadvantaged pupils. This includes financial support for music tuition, additional swimming lessons and school trips. Also, you work closely with colleagues, particularly the inclusion manager, to prioritise places for disadvantaged pupils on programmes including individual tuition, specialist counselling and access to a learning mentor. This support has improved pupils' social skills, helped to raise their self-esteem and boosted their interest in learning.
- Governors keep a close eye on how disadvantaged pupils are doing, making this a particular priority and asking searching questions of school leaders during their

monthly pupil achievement meetings.

- The achievement of disadvantaged pupils is set to rise this year. Your provisional results from 2017 indicate that the proportion of pupils who have reached the required standard has improved considerably. Nevertheless, the school's own information shows that the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is still lower than that of other pupils. I have asked you to consider how best to improve the situation, and to make this a priority for improving your school further.
- My final line of enquiry was about how well the curriculum is equipping pupils with broad and balanced learning experiences. Some of the information on the school's website, including information about reading schemes and phonics, was not up to date.
- When we visited classrooms, we looked at pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their experience of the curriculum. It was clear that learning across a broad range of subjects is a strength of the school. Pupils enjoy having their say about the content of their topics, and this helps promote interest and engagement.
- Outside, pupils love helping to look after the hens and collect eggs for the school kitchen. Year 4 pupils enjoyed their recent experience of camping overnight on the school field, followed by a day of outdoor learning. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 also benefit from residential visits. Pupils grow plants in the school garden and make good use of the wooded area, where they can play, explore and study environmental topics.
- Equality and diversity are celebrated in the curriculum. For example, pupils learned about overcoming prejudice and intolerance when they received a visit from a holocaust survivor.
- Music and chess are also strengths of the school. These provide further rich opportunities for pupils to experience a wide range of activities and carry them out to a good standard.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- steps are taken to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils
- the teaching of spelling improves, in order to raise outcomes in writing
- teachers are supported in their drive to secure consistently high outcomes, by sharing ideas with colleagues and by collaborating with other local partner schools
- subject leaders build on their recent successes by taking even more opportunities to support, monitor and report to governors on the quality of teaching and the progress pupils are making.

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

will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Nick Rudman  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you and your deputy to discuss progress since the previous inspection. I held a meeting with two senior leaders who have responsibility for reading and writing, to discuss outcomes for pupils and the impact of decisions that leaders have made. I met with two governors, including the chair of the governing body, and I met with a representative from the local authority who knows the school well. I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including your records of monitoring and evaluation, governing body minutes of meetings, and the school's assessment information for all year groups. I also scrutinised the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, the records of checks that leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children, and information relating to attendance. We both undertook observations of learning across the school, viewed work in pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their learning during lessons.