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Mrs Paula Masters
Headteacher
Holly Trees Primary School
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Dear Mrs Masters

Short inspection of Holly Trees Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 14 September 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 have created a vibrant school community where pupils are eager to learn. Pupils have positive attitudes towards learning. Despite several changes in staff since the previous inspection, you have built a team who shares your passion for providing high-quality education in a caring and supportive environment. There is a sense of teamwork throughout the school. As a result, staff and pupils are happy. All pupils I spoke to say that they enjoy coming to school. Staff are proud to work in the school and parents are complimentary about the education, care and support their children receive.

Governors share your high expectations and are fully involved in the school's work. They have a good understanding of their role and carry it out effectively. However, they have not ensured that all of the school's policies are reviewed frequently enough or meet the latest guidance, for example the equality statement.

Attainment at the end of key stage 2 dipped to below average in 2016 and you correctly identified what you needed to do to improve standards. Effective action resulted in more pupils at the end of key stage 2 attaining the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics in 2017. However, there is still room for improvement as pupils' progress was no better than average in reading and writing.

Pupils receive helpful feedback enabling them to improve their work. Pupils' work shows that this is having a positive impact on their progress across a range of subjects. The changes you have made to teaching handwriting have resulted in improved letter formation and neatness. I saw good evidence of this in pupils' books.

The introduction of more interesting learning activities, often outside the classroom, has caught the imagination of the pupils, especially boys. Pupils have the opportunity to write across a range of subjects. Progress and attainment in writing are improving for current pupils. Although attainment in writing is typically above average for the majority of pupils, progress from individual starting points remains lower than the national average. In order to improve pupils' progress, there is a need to embed teaching strategies to ensure consistently high-quality teaching throughout the school.

You provide pupils with a rich and engaging curriculum. Pupils benefit from specialist teachers delivering physical education, music and art lessons. This curriculum successfully supports pupils' personal development and well-being, together with engagement in learning. Pupils have access to a range of activities and clubs before and after school. Pupils have the opportunity to develop their leadership and teamworking skills by participating in 'eco heroes' and Fair Trade and community projects. For example, Year 5 pupils are working with a group of adults who have a range of disabilities.

Pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons remains outstanding. The overwhelming majority of parents agree. Opportunities for pupils to take on responsibilities and express their views enable them to develop into confident and self-assured young people. This is a school that cares about every pupil. Pupils respect one another, regardless of any individual's background, views, race or religion.

Safeguarding is effective.

All involved in the school are committed to making sure that pupils are safe and well cared for. You ensure that all the necessary checks are carried out to guarantee the suitability of staff to work with children. Training for safeguarding pupils is updated annually and meets the latest guidance. Staff are aware of the procedures they should follow if they have any concerns about children and take the appropriate action. Pupils say that they are safe in school and that bullying is very rare. Pupils have confidence in staff dealing with any concerns they raise as they feel listened to. Parents agree that pupils are safe and well cared for in school.

The inclusion team works exceptionally well with outside agencies to support pupils who are vulnerable or who have additional needs. Pupils attend school regularly and there are now very few pupils who are persistently absent from school. This is because of the highly effective support given to pupils and their families, which includes mentoring and daily contact with parents. Pupils who join the school mid-

year are exceptionally well supported and families receive a home visit prior to starting school.

Inspection findings

- One area we explored was whether teachers were setting work that was challenging enough for pupils, especially in key stage 2. We agreed that this would be a suitable line of enquiry as it was an area for improvement from the previous inspection.
- You have correctly prioritised mathematics teaching as an area to strengthen. The changes made to the teaching of mathematics have included more opportunities for pupils to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills. Work in pupils' books confirmed that they are set work that makes them think hard. This is resulting in good progress for all ability groups and ensures that a growing proportion of pupils are making faster progress. The progress of disadvantaged pupils is rapid because of the support they receive, including individual help to understand the vocabulary or mathematical calculations needed for the next steps.
- Guided reading has also been a focus for the school. The early signs are that pupils' progress in reading is improving, especially for disadvantaged pupils, the most able and middle-ability pupils. Most of these pupils are able to fluently read books appropriate to their age. I listened to a group of pupils from key stages 1 and 2 read. These pupils have received additional help with their reading. All pupils were able to use their phonics knowledge to read difficult and unfamiliar vocabulary. Older pupils were able to read fluently and some used expression well to bring life to the story. I agree with your assessment that the school needs to further develop the reading skills of lower-ability pupils so that more pupils are able to read texts suitable for their age.
- The attainment of pupils in key stage 1 has historically been above average in reading, writing and mathematics. The progress of children in the early years has improved since the previous inspection. We agreed that I would look at the provision for these key stages to determine whether this was still an area of strength in the school.
- In the Reception class, I found children to be learning in a safe, calm, bright and stimulating environment. On the day of the inspection, some children were attending Reception for the first time. These children had quickly settled and were happily working together and with adults. Relationships between adults and children were positive. Children who started Reception earlier this term were being suitably challenged with work that was making them think. Early years provision remains a strength.
- The work in the books of pupils in key stage 1 illustrates that they continue to make good progress. Pupils who leave Reception having exceeded the expected level of development are making faster-than-expected progress in key stage 1. Pupils in Year 2 are already able to write, joining their letters, and use simple punctuation correctly. Learning activities are engaging and the pupils I saw were

all eager learners. Outcomes for pupils in key stage 1 remain a strength of the school.

- I looked at the impact of the special educational needs funding on outcomes for pupils.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported. The school makes sure that the specific needs of the pupils are met through the right type of provision. The special educational needs coordinator ensures that pupils' progress is carefully monitored and that actions taken to support pupils are evaluated. Particular attention is given to providing pupils with the help they need to fill the gaps in their knowledge and understanding. If pupils' support is not effective, it is modified. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported in the classroom and work in their books shows strong progress, especially in mathematics.
- I looked at the impact of the pupil premium funding on outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and found that the outcomes are improving. Provisional results this year illustrate that the differences in the progress of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally are diminishing. Progress in reading, writing and mathematics has improved from below average to at least average. Progress in mathematics was particularly strong. You are using the additional funding effectively to break down the learning problems faced by the pupils across the school. Pupils have full access to all school trips and visits. Targeted support is in place for pupils' social and emotional needs, as well as their learning, which includes one-to-one support.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers build upon and embed the existing approaches to reading and writing to:
 - speed up the progress of pupils in reading, particularly lower-ability pupils
 - increase the progress of pupils in writing so that it is above average for different groups of pupils
- school policies are reviewed and updated at the appropriate time and meet the latest guidance.

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

Caroline Pardy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held discussions with you, the deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator and the inclusion manager. I also met with four members of the governing body. I visited classrooms with you and the deputy headteacher to evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' learning, to review the quality of pupils' work over time and to talk informally with pupils about their experiences of the school. I listened to groups of pupils from key stages 1 and 2 read. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school in lessons and at breaktime, when I also spoke to them informally. I studied your improvement plan and self-evaluation, and policies relating to behaviour and keeping pupils safe. I checked documents on the school's website. I considered the views of 109 parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including 62 free-text responses. I took account of the 23 responses to the staff questionnaire.