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Mr Darran Callaghan
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Dear Mr Callaghan

Short inspection of Holywell Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 2 November 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 April 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 lead the school with passion and commitment. You have high aspirations and hold the respect of the whole school community. Your partnership with other members of the leadership team is strong. Teaching and support staff are highly motivated. Parents that I spoke to during the inspection were very complimentary about the way staff care for pupils.

Visits to classrooms showed the school to be a happy place. Most pupils were deeply engaged in learning. This included in Reception, where children explained in great detail how they were using recipe cards to make mud pies and sand tea. Pupils in Year 1 were very motivated as they hunted for real and fake words hidden around the classroom. Their phonics skills are already developing well.

My time in key stage 2 enabled me to talk to pupils about the quality of their work and how they enjoy the learning which teachers plan for them. It was pleasing to see how staff are focusing on motivating boys to write. The group of Year 6 boys that I spoke to were keen to explain that their literacy skills are improving. Across the school I was able to see how pupils from vulnerable groups are supported with their learning. This accords well with the school's vision that no child should get left behind.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors highlighted the many strengths of the

school, including the high expectations of leaders, pupils making good progress, and good relationships between pupils and staff. They also identified the need for extra challenge for most-able pupils; for pupils' independent learning skills to be further strengthened; and for children in Reception to be given more opportunities to develop their early literacy skills. Leaders have addressed these matters successfully. Outcomes at the end of Reception are strong, especially in reading and writing. Pupils in all year groups, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, enjoy learning. They talk confidently about how they enjoy finding out about new things. Levels of challenge in classrooms are appropriate. Pupils also enjoy choosing from a range of additional challenges which are provided for them through the day.

Since the last inspection, leaders have continued the important process of self-evaluation. You were able to tell me about the school's many strengths, as well as the key priorities that need to be developed. These include accelerating pupils' progress in reading and mathematics across key stage 2, as well as improving writing outcomes for boys. You agreed with me that whole-school development planning needs to be sharper and contain clearer criteria for success. This will allow leaders and governors to monitor key improvement priorities in a more timely and effective manner.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school is a safe and caring environment and has a strong culture that protects children and staff. The single central record of staff checks is well maintained. Staff know what to do and who to speak to if they have concerns.

Pastoral support for pupils is a strength. Pupils know about the potential dangers when using the internet or social media. They know what bullying is, but said it rarely or never happens at Holywell. They were also very clear that they feel safe in school. All parents who spoke to me at the start of the school day said they feel their children are safe and well cared for at school. However, a few parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey expressed concerns about whether bullying is always dealt with quickly enough.

Inspection findings

- Inspection activities focused closely on the progress pupils make across key stage 2 in reading and mathematics; the quality of provision for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds; boys' progress in writing; and all aspects of safeguarding.
- Most pupils are making good or better progress across the school. Leaders have reacted swiftly to address the disappointing progress measures in reading and mathematics in the provisional test outcomes at the end of Year 6 in 2017. A renewed focus on improving inference and deduction skills is providing pupils in key stage 2 with the tools to improve their understanding of texts when reading. Leaders are also ensuring that teachers provide pupils with more opportunities to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills in mathematics. Early

indications are that pupils are enjoying the fresh challenges they are being given and are developing more confidence. Importantly, leaders have not compromised the breadth and balance of the curriculum in their drive to improve outcomes in reading and mathematics.

- Provision for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds is good. This is especially the case in key stage 1. Leaders and governors track the progress of disadvantaged pupils well, although some pupils from this vulnerable group are not making as much progress as they could in key stage 2. Teachers are aware of the progress disadvantaged pupils are making and the need to make this a high priority. Leaders know that outcomes for this group need to improve.
- In the recent past, boys have not made as much progress in writing as girls as they move through key stage 2. Leaders have made improving this situation a high priority. Introducing boy-friendly texts and adding an element of competition to initiatives to boost boys' spelling and grammar skills are already having a positive impact. Classroom visits provided evidence that pupils are writing more often and at length, as well as editing and improving their work over time. School leaders are confident that the disparity in outcomes in writing between boys and girls is diminishing. Evidence seen in books and writing folders during the inspection confirms this.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils make more progress in key stage 2, so that their outcomes improve to become outstanding
- staff continue to focus on the progress made by pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, so that their outcomes improve to match those of other pupils within the school and nationally
- school development planning is further refined, so that leaders and governors have a clearer understanding of the progress made in addressing the key priorities for improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Close
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I visited every year group, assessing the progress pupils were making and talking to them about their learning. I observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms and at breaktimes. I met with senior and middle leaders, both vice-chairs of the governing body accompanied by three other governors, a representative of the local authority, and a representative group of pupils. I talked to parents at the start of the school day. I took into account the 54 replies to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire and accompanying text messages. I also took into account the 17 replies to the staff survey and the 27 replies to the pupil survey. I scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including pupils' progress information, the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies, minutes of governing body meetings and records of visits by the local authority.