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Mrs Jacky Pike
Headteacher
Shears Green Junior School
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Dear Mrs Pike

Short inspection of Shears Green Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 28 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 October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education seen in the school since the last inspection. You are passionately committed to the pupils of Shears Green and determined that they will receive the best provision possible. To that end, you have built a highly effective leadership team, including governors, who are all focused on driving the school forward. You have united the wider team, so that everyone works together. Expectations have been raised. You said, 'Children are buckling down now because expectations are higher across the board.' Pupils' outcomes last year reflected teachers' raised expectations, and the progress of current pupils and the work in their books reflect these aspirations. Only the best will do.

You have introduced many changes which are having a positive impact on both the enjoyment and engagement of pupils. The new curriculum offers exciting opportunities, such as creating Mayan art and gathering and analysing pupils' fingerprints. Pupils enjoy a wide range of trips and visitors, which make learning meaningful. The new assessment system is helping you and governors to better analyse performance, and to hold staff to account. This system is also being used to measure the effectiveness of initiatives. However, you are not complacent. You know that some groups of pupils, such as the most able disadvantaged, do not make as much progress as their peers in all areas, and that too few attain the higher standards. You are also, rightly, focused on raising pupils' achievement even further in reading.

Most parents are supportive of the changes that have happened since you took up post two years ago. Comments such as 'much better communication', 'recent changes have been for the better' and 'she has added a sense of fun to the school' were typical of those received. You are aware of a small minority of parents who remain unhappy with some aspects of the school. Along with governors, you are continuing to seek parental opinion and to respond appropriately.

Pupils like their school. They told me that teachers 'want to see what we can do' and that teachers work hard to 'try to make sure it is all equal'. Pupils relish the many opportunities to play a role in the school's community such as being a house captain. They value the merits they are given when 'you have a chance to shine', and the systems to support their personal development such as walking Nelson, the school's dog.

You have built on the strengths in progress, leadership and extra-curricular provision identified in the previous inspection report. Leadership has been further strengthened by regular opportunities for staff to visit other schools, engage in shared moderation and work with the locality partnership, the Northfleet Trust. You have effectively addressed those areas that the previous inspection identified as in need of improvement. The work in pupils' books and on display around the school shows a wide range of curriculum activities that are developing pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding, required for the next stage of their education. Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are making good progress from their starting points, especially in Years 5 and 6. The support that they receive is well matched to their needs, and delivered by a highly skilled and effective support team.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff receive regular and up-to-date training about safeguarding. Processes to record any concerns are clear, and understood by all. Timely meetings ensure that information is shared appropriately. Leaders work in partnership with a range of other agencies to ensure that pupils and their families get the support that they need. Your effective work to highlight the importance of regular attendance has resulted in improved attendance.

Pupils, who spoke to me, told me that they feel safe around the school. While bullying does occasionally occur, pupils are confident that staff resolve things quickly and effectively. They know that they can speak to staff, or use a worry box to share their concerns, and that these will be swiftly acted on. Leaders' actions to improve behaviour and their insistence that pupils move safely around school have resulted in a calm, purposeful atmosphere. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and who find moving around the school more difficult have particularly benefited from these changes.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision, including: the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements; pupils' attendance; the achievement of disadvantaged pupils; the achievement of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities; the effectiveness of the wider curriculum in developing pupils' writing and mathematics skills; and the effectiveness of the teaching of reading.
- In the 2017 Year 6 national assessments, pupils' progress from their starting points at the end of key stage 1 improved considerably in writing and mathematics. The books of current pupils show that this improvement in standards is school-wide, although teachers' expectations are highest in Years 5 and 6. Work in pupils' books across the school shows a myriad of purposeful and exciting opportunities to write in a range of styles, as well as teachers' high expectations of writing across the curriculum. The school's basic non-negotiables for accurate punctuation and good presentation are consistently strong across the curriculum. Pupils are determined to get their handwriting pens, or even to regain them, if the right to use a pen has been lost. This spurs pupils on to present their work well.
- Mathematics is extended systematically through the afternoon challenge sessions. Mathematics becomes even more meaningful when used for purposes such as graphically representing the different types of fingerprint patterns, or in science investigations.
- The majority of current pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are making good progress from their starting points. This is particularly the case in Years 5 and 6, because pupils' individual needs are understood well and met through appropriate teaching, good relationships and highly skilled support. Lower down the school, the identification of need can be slower, although pupils are supported to succeed as a result of effective teaching. Leaders are working proactively with their partner infant school to ensure that they have all the information they need to identify needs early and support pupils more quickly. Working with parents through the parent forum's regular meetings also helps to gain a full picture of pupils' individual needs.
- In the 2017 end of key stage 2 national assessments, disadvantaged pupils did not make as much progress in writing and mathematics as their peers, while still showing progress that was broadly in line with pupils nationally. A smaller proportion of disadvantaged pupils attained the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics than other pupils. Work in pupils' books shows that current disadvantaged pupils are making good progress from their starting points. Governors and leaders monitor their progress carefully to help ensure that additional funding is spent effectively to support them. However, leaders are rightly aspirational and know that the progress of all the most able disadvantaged pupils in the school needs to accelerate if the attainment gaps are to close.
- Work to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils has had a positive impact. The school has taken every possible action to secure good attendance, although in some individual, complex cases there is still more improvement

needed.

- In the 2017 national tests, Year 6 pupils did not make as much progress from their starting points in reading as they did in writing and mathematics. While the proportions of pupils attaining the expected standard exceeded that seen nationally, the percentage of pupils attaining the higher standards was below national levels. Because of this, we looked together at the effectiveness of the teaching of reading across the school. Current pupils are competent readers. Pupils, who read to me, and those who we observed reading around the school, read with flair, accuracy and understanding. Teaching helped pupils to derive meaning and information from interesting texts, and extended their thinking effectively. Leaders acknowledge that the teaching of the higher order reading skills is not yet consistently strong across the school, although the introduction of high-quality texts and specific staff training are supporting the development of these skills.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers' expectations and aspirations are high for all pupils, but especially for the disadvantaged so that more attain the higher standard at the end of key stage 2
- pupils' comprehension skills are strengthened to further improve outcomes in reading.

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

Deborah Gordon
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, members of the governing body, staff and a representative from the local authority. I reviewed documentation, including: information about pupils' achievement; the school improvement plan; and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school and in their classes. Together, we visited all year groups. In classes, I observed teaching, looked at pupils' books, heard pupils read and spoke to them about their work. I met with four pupils to get their views of the school and to hear them read. I took account of parents' views, by talking with them on the playground in the morning, reviewing parents' responses to the school's own questionnaire and considering 35 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 32 free-text comments.