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Sarah Pipe
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Dear Mrs Pipe

Short inspection of Parkgate Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 9 January 2018, 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 December 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

The many parents and carers who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and sent additional text messages are overwhelmingly positive about the school. All would recommend the school to other families. Parents are, rightly, effusive about your leadership. They say that you are exceptionally approachable and that children wish to work hard for you and the staff. These positive comments mirror the findings of this inspection. You have created a wonderful school community. You expect high standards of yourself and of all those who work for the 'Parkgate Family'.

Through our discussions, it became quickly obvious that you are very aware of your pupils' personal, academic and emotional needs. Your effective working partnership with the deputy headteacher and subject leaders is rapidly improving provision and outcomes. Collectively, staff work well together across all classes. Changes in roles and responsibilities, following a restructure at the end of the Summer term 2017, have been managed very sensitively. The needs of the pupils were central to the decisions you and the governors made at the time. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning was not affected and the school has maintained its strong

capacity to improve.

Classroom visits showed the school to be a very happy place, where pupils enjoy learning and make very good progress. This includes pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. With the support of staff, you work tirelessly to raise standards for all groups of pupils. The school's same-day intervention strategy ensures that staff promptly find solutions to mitigate barriers to learning. Several pupils told me that their teachers helped them a lot and that they enjoyed their work as a result. Pupils' attitudes to their learning are excellent.

At the time of the previous inspection, inspectors highlighted the many strengths of the school, including the good leadership and governance, the rich curriculum and the rapid progress in a range of subjects. They also identified the need for teachers to probe pupils' understanding more carefully and to improve outcomes in phonics and reading. You have addressed these matters very successfully. Teaching and support staff work effectively together to challenge all pupils. Strategies to accelerate pupils' progress in reading and phonics, including the excellent use of the school's library, are now highly effective.

Your process to evaluate the school's strengths and areas for further improvement is precise and accurate. This is one of the reasons why the school is on an improving trajectory. During our first meeting, you explained clearly the school's many strengths, as well as the priorities for development. You are also well aware that the quality of pupils' writing across the curriculum is not yet as good as other areas of the school's work. Standards in writing require some consolidation to meet your high expectations and to accelerate pupils' progress across subjects. A few parents wrote that work could be more demanding in mathematics. With the expert knowledge of the subject leader, you are checking this very carefully through, among other techniques, frequent pupils' progress meetings and the forensic analysis of performance information.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils say that they feel safe at school. They are confident that staff would support them should they have any concerns. You have identified the specific safety risks that exist in the area, in particular the nearby railway crossing and the density of vehicle traffic around the school. The curriculum offers many opportunities for pupils to understand how to stay safe, including when online or using social media.

As the designated safeguarding lead, you ensure that all arrangements for safeguarding and for pupils' welfare are fit for purpose and kept under continuous review. Your frequent contacts with parents or other family members enable the immediate exchange of information related to individual pupils. You maintain effective links with external agencies. The work of the family support worker, who provides practical help to several families, is particularly beneficial to pupils' physical and emotional needs.

Inspection findings

- At our first meeting, we agreed several key lines of enquiry to ascertain whether the school remained at least good. You succinctly presented the marked improvement that had been achieved in several areas. I was able to check this out during the day. Pupils behaved impeccably. Teachers' subject knowledge and the way they managed the learning to meet pupils' multiple needs were exemplary. Staff were asking challenging questions. There was a buzz of excitement for learning in the classrooms I visited. Almost all of the 62 pupils who completed the survey as part of this inspection said that they are encouraged to do their best and all would recommend the school to their friends. This range of first-hand evidence appears to indicate that the school has improved strongly since the previous inspection.
- As my first line of enquiry, I checked whether the progress of the most able pupils was rapid enough. This was because too few pupils achieved high standards in writing in the 2017 results. Work scrutiny shows that pupils who have high prior attainment are given many opportunities to develop their knowledge across subjects. However, the breadth and depth of writing require further work. The school is currently engaged in an initiative, the Language in Literacy Across the Curriculum (LiLAC) project, to improve writing. It is too early to report on the impact of this project.
- The second key line of enquiry was to check how well additional funding was used to improve the attendance and outcomes of pupils who are disadvantaged because, over time, they have not done as well as all pupils nationally. The school provides very well for these pupils. Each pupil meets weekly with a dedicated mentor. Progress is closely monitored and actions promptly taken to fill any gaps in pupils' learning. In class, I saw that support staff are well briefed by the class teacher and, consequently, they are well equipped to meet the needs of the pupils they work with.
- The school's strategy for use of additional pupil premium funding is precise. It shows the specific barriers that slow pupils' learning, including persistent absence, and identifies relevant targets for improvement. The school's current performance information indicates that pupils who are disadvantaged make at least good progress from their starting points. The difference in their achievement, compared with all pupils, is reducing. You are aware that, in Year 6, further work is required to accelerate the learning of a few pupils. The focus on the progress of most-able pupils who are also disadvantaged and the close monitoring of any groups of pupils, however small, exemplify the high expectations that you and the governors have of all those who attend Parkgate Junior School.
- We also agreed the need to check the effectiveness of leadership, paying specific attention to the quality of the transition from the infant to the junior school. This is a strength of the school. You have established very close working relationships with leaders and staff at the infant school. Transition is seamless. Assessment information is analysed very carefully to ensure that pupils' starting points on entry into Year 3 are known and built upon quickly. Pupils told me that they feel well prepared to start Year 3 and that they are not at all worried because they

know Parkgate Junior is a nice school before they even start.

- Parents praise your leadership, and that of the deputy headteacher and subject leaders. Staff say that they enjoy their work and are proud to work at the school. This is a significant achievement considering the challenging and unpopular decisions you and the governors had to take during the 2017 restructure. Governors have the necessary level of expertise to hold you and other leaders to account and they do this very well. You are far from complacent and always seek to do better. For example, you joined the 'coasting schools' project, although the school was not in that category, to benefit from the expertise and challenge of local advisers.
- Finally, I looked at the quality of the school's curriculum. The curriculum prepares pupils extremely well for the demands of secondary schools. It offers fun experiences and many opportunities for practical learning. These develop pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding. As far as possible, the curriculum is based on pupils' own choices and interests. The learning environment reflects this rich curriculum. Work on display shows how pupils are encouraged to have a say through, for example, hanging comments on the inspiration tree, being creative in art and taking part in exciting science investigations. The central location of the well-stocked library shows its importance in developing pupils' love of reading.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- outcomes in writing are consolidated across all subjects, so that more pupils reach the high standards of which they are capable.

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

Yours sincerely

Marianick Ellender-Gelé
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with you, the deputy headteacher and some subject leaders. I met five members of the governing body, including the chair. I spoke to the school's improvement partner. You and the deputy headteacher joined me on visits to classrooms, where we looked at pupils' work. I spoke with pupils and staff throughout the day. I observed pupils in lessons and at breaktime. I considered 62 responses to the Ofsted's online questionnaire for pupils and 50 responses to the online questionnaire for parents, Parent View. I also took account of 28 text

messages sent by parents. Nine staff completed Ofsted's staff survey. I examined the school's documentation, including the school's improvement plan, your own review of the school's effectiveness, and information relating to safeguarding and pupils' progress.