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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Ian Baker
Headteacher
Gatcombe Park Primary School
St Barbara Way
Hilsea
Portsmouth
Hampshire
PO2 0UR

Dear Mr Baker

Short inspection of Gatcombe Park Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 30 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in November 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Together with your deputy, you provide clear and ambitious leadership. You work effectively with the multi-academy trust, who provide rigorous monitoring and challenge. Since your appointment as headteacher in 2016, you have worked successfully to develop the skills of school leaders. The effective leadership structure focuses successfully on teamwork and shared accountability. Leaders have a clear and accurate view of what the school does well and what could be even better.

Pupils enjoy coming to Gatcombe Park Primary School and display positive attitudes to learning. They take great pride in their work. Pupils say their teachers always help them when they get 'stuck'. They work well together. For example, I observed Year 6 pupils discussing a character from a novel. They listened to each other intently and responded thoughtfully to their classmates' comments. Pupils say their school is friendly and behaviour is 'peaceful and respectful'. They have a strong understanding of equality.

The inspection report for your predecessor school highlighted several strengths, including high attendance records, a good curriculum and a focus on improving both personal and academic outcomes for the pupils. These aspects continue to be strong. At the time of the last inspection, the school was asked to remove the inconsistencies in teaching, and raise attainment and progress in computing. Leaders' work to address these issues has been effective. You successfully place

great importance on continually improving the quality of teaching in the school. You have employed a specialist computer teacher, who ensures that pupils are challenged in coding, as well as increasing their knowledge of how computers work.

Leaders have identified that there is still work to be done to ensure that the outcomes for the middle-attaining pupils are stronger. At the end of key stage 2, in 2017, the progress that the middle-attaining pupils made was below that of their classmates. In addition, the proportion of these pupils attaining the higher standards was below the national average. We also agreed that accelerating the progress that disadvantaged pupils make in the school should be a key priority for leaders in the immediate future. Currently, this group of pupils makes less progress in reading, writing and mathematics than pupils with the same starting points nationally.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders and governors ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Referrals are made swiftly when necessary. Staff are vigilant in following up any welfare concerns they have about a child. Leaders have established strong relationships with external agencies. Pre-employment checks are fully in place. Safeguarding training is regular and induction of new staff is well planned. As a result, staff and governors understand their roles and responsibilities very well.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that there is an adult they can go to if they feel worried. They appreciate the 'Help Me Box' which they use to request to speak to a member of staff about anything that concerns them. As a result, pupils feel listened to. They told me that bullying very rarely happens but, if it does, adults would, 'fix it'. Pupils show a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe online.

Inspection findings

- Before the inspection, we agreed that the focuses for my visit would be on achievement in reading; the progress of middle-attaining pupils in mathematics; how well leaders work to improve teaching; and the effectiveness of the governing body.
- In 2017, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading by the end of key stage 1 was below the national average and the proportion of pupils reaching the higher standards in reading by the end of key stage 2 was below the national average. You have responded swiftly to these results. Leaders have introduced new teaching strategies, focusing sharply on reading skills. Pupils' work indicates that this new approach to the teaching of reading is beginning to have a positive impact, particularly on the ability of older pupils to summarise. Pupils' enjoyment in reading lessons was clear. They told me how much they enjoy reading, especially the shortlisted novels for the Portsmouth book awards, for which they would vote. You have a strong system for tracking the progress pupils are making. This shows that most pupils are making steady

progress in reading. We did agree, however, that the progress that disadvantaged pupils make could be faster. This mirrors the weaker progress these pupils make in other subjects.

- In 2017, the proportions of middle-attaining pupils who met the expected and the higher standard for their age in mathematics, at the end of Year 6, were below the national average. Inspection evidence shows that there are weaknesses in the achievement of these pupils in mathematics and in other subjects. Increasing the rate of progress for these pupils continues to be a suitable focus for the school. You have recently introduced new teaching strategies in mathematics to accelerate the rate of progress pupils are making. Expectations of what pupils can achieve have risen. Teachers carefully use pupils' starting points to ensure that tasks are suitably challenging. During my visits to lessons, and in my scrutiny of pupils' work, I observed pupils confidently applying their mathematical knowledge to real-life situations. Teachers ensure that there are many opportunities for pupils to master and apply their skills.
- Leaders have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching in the school. Middle leaders have the opportunity to use their specialised subject knowledge to coach and develop staff. Feedback to staff is specific and expectations are clear. Leaders engage well with the multi-academy trust, which adds further capacity for securing improvements.
- The governing body carries out its statutory duties effectively. They commission reviews from the multi-academy trust on aspects of school improvement to validate what leaders are telling them. These reviews are then used effectively to support and challenge the school. We agreed that steps to measure success in the pupil premium strategy lack clarity and do not provide enough opportunities for governors to understand about the progress of disadvantaged pupils. This hampers governors in holding leaders fully to account.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a greater proportion of the middle-attaining pupils meet and exceed the expected standards for their age
- there are clear steps to measure success in the pupil premium strategy, to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make consistently strong progress.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive officer of the Hamwic Education Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Portsmouth. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lea Hannam
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your deputy to discuss the school's effectiveness. Together, we visited lessons to observe pupils' learning, speak to pupils and look at their work. Alongside the mathematics leader, we assessed the quality of pupils' work in books. I met with two governors, including the chair of the governing body, and spoke to pupils about their school. I considered 40 responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's online questionnaire and the accompanying free-text comments. I spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day. Staff questionnaires were also considered. I spoke with a representative from your multi-academy trust. I evaluated the school's safeguarding arrangements. A wide range of documentation, including your self-evaluation, pupils' progress information, reports from the multi-academy trust and policies, was examined.