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Mrs Victoria Acors  
Headteacher  
Hersden Village Primary School  
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Hersden  
Canterbury  
Kent  
CT3 4HS

Dear Mrs Acors

### **Short inspection of Hersden Village Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 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 May 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement 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.

Hersden Village Primary School has gone from strength to strength under the stewardship of The Stour Academy Trust. Your appointment as headteacher in September 2017 was the latest step in the trust's successful programme of developing and promoting leaders from within their schools. Your staff really value the leadership you bring to the school and are wholeheartedly positive about working with their colleagues and the pupils of Hersden. Parents are very positive about the school, with one saying: 'My son has really come out of his shell since starting [at] this school in September. His teachers are amazing. I can't fault them. It's such a happy and caring environment, which is perfect.'

Working collaboratively with other leaders in the trust you have transformed the school environment and built a strong vision of what the very best teaching looks like. The vast majority of pupils enjoy coming to school and told me that they are pleased that the staff are, 'always there for you and know you well'. Pupils love their teachers because they make their lessons fun and interesting. You are taking every possible step to support and challenge the few remaining families where

pupils do not attend school frequently enough.

You serve an area of relative deprivation and are keen that pupils have a wide range of opportunities to learn about topics that are beyond their daily life experiences. The trust's 'pledge' to provide a range of experiences, such as taking a weekend camping trip and watching a live theatre production for free to all pupils during their time at the school adds to the broad, balanced and lively curriculum.

Your staff plan learning opportunities that completely meet the needs of the pupils they teach. As a result, current pupils, and especially those who are disadvantaged, make rapid progress. Teaching is characterised by high expectations, strong subject knowledge, pupils who are highly engaged in their learning, and a strong focus on developing pupils' 'VIP vocabulary' to show their increasing skill using powerful language. You have standardised approaches across the school (and trust) that ensure that pupils know what to expect from their lessons and know what will be expected of them. This allows them to achieve exceptionally well, especially in their writing. Teachers and teaching assistants use questioning and modelling techniques relentlessly (in a positive way) to squeeze out as much learning as possible, taking every opportunity to develop pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills further.

At the time of the previous inspection leaders were asked to improve the leadership skills of middle leaders so they had a consistently strong impact across the trust. The steady, careful growth of the trust has allowed leaders and teachers to collaborate more and more. Trust leaders add expertise to all schools, including Hersden. This benefits staff, who are able to collaborate with planning and teaching, and also moderate assessments together. Also at the time of the previous inspection in 2014, leaders were asked to improve the reading skills of older pupils, and there was some initial improvement in this area. However, the initial improvements were not sustained and the results in the 2016 national key stage 2 reading assessments were disappointing. You very quickly addressed this issue. It continues to be a focus area for the school, and reading is currently rapidly improving.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The trust has employed a safeguarding lead with relevant experience and expertise to lead work in all trust schools to keep pupils safe from harm. She is based at Hersden and has been instrumental in training all staff, including those who share the responsibility for leading safeguarding, effectively.

Staff, parents and pupils are entirely confident that the school takes every possible step to keep the pupils safe. Details of any concerns are carefully recorded and analysed using an online system. Highly effective partnership working with families and other professionals, including around domestic abuse, contributes strongly to pupils staying safe.

### **Inspection findings**

- Leaders explained that making sure pupils attend regularly is a 'team effort'. Every member of staff has a responsibility to help improve attendance. In 2017, attendance was below the national average. In a small school like Hersden it only takes a few pupils to be persistently absent to cause this. Attendance is rising slowly this year because fewer pupils have had prolonged periods of absence. However, leaders are not complacent and continue to work well with families and other agencies to help improve attendance overall.
- Published assessment information suggests that pupils have made slower progress in reading during key stage 2 in recent years. However, your detailed analysis shows that this was due to pupils not performing well in the Year 6 national tests, especially in 2016. In the past, pupils lacked the resilience and vocabulary to achieve well at the end of key stage 2. This was despite reading performance being strong in the early years and at key stage 1, including in the phonics screening check.
- Leaders have introduced a new well-thought-out programme that develops pupils' skills as a reader, building on their strong phonics knowledge. Highly effective teaching by teachers and teaching assistants is leading to current pupils making rapid and sustained progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills, both in word reading and in comprehension. Pupils are challenged to read and respond to challenging texts that often link to learning in other subjects. Teachers recommend books to individual pupils in key stage 2 that they will enjoy but that will also challenge them by making them think deeply. As a result, pupils across the school are currently achieving very well in reading.
- Additional teaching helps the few pupils who have fallen behind in reading to catch up quickly at key stage 1 and key stage 2. For example, pupils in key stage 2 attend additional workshops to hone their inference skills.
- Progress and attainment in writing at key stage 2 are impressive. Pupils apply their writing skills confidently in a wide range of tasks across the curriculum. However, in 2016 the standards achieved in the English grammar, punctuation and spelling assessments were not as positive. Leaders responded to this immediately. Grammar, punctuation and spelling are a strong focus in every classroom: teachers model the correct use of grammar and punctuation expertly. Spelling has a high priority, for example 'the dirty 30' trickiest spellings that the oldest pupils need to master are well known. In pupils' work across a wide range of subjects their spelling and use of grammar and punctuation are generally very accurate.
- All groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, and the most able, develop their knowledge, skills and understanding very well in a wide range of subjects. Investigative skills in science, and in design technology, are developed particularly well. Teaching in mathematics develops pupils' skills of fluency, problem-solving and reasoning very effectively. These skills are then applied regularly in science, design technology and topic work. Pupils use their writing skills exceptionally well to write about their learning in a wide range of subjects.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to support and challenge families so all pupils attend school regularly
- they build on the current strong teaching of reading in key stage 2 by using every opportunity to apply pupils' reading skills and develop pupils' resilience as readers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of The Stour Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lee Selby  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, the executive headteacher and other leaders from the trust. You and I visited all classes together to observe learning and talk to pupils about their work. I heard some pupils from Year 2 and Year 6 read. We looked at a wide range of pupils' work from all areas of the curriculum together. I met with the chief executive officer of The Stour Academy Trust and the chair of the school's local advisory board. I scrutinised a range of school documentation relating to safeguarding, attendance, pupils' progress and governance. I considered 14 responses to the confidential staff survey, 53 responses to the pupil survey and 26 responses to Parent View, including 12 free-text comments.