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Mr Nick Norman
Headteacher
Burleigh Primary School
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Dear Mr Norman

Short inspection of Burleigh Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 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 February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You have had to deal with a number of very serious and challenging, sometimes tragic, issues since you took over as headteacher 18 months ago. You have shown enormous compassion, integrity and resilience during these testing times. Above everything, you have kept the pupils in your care at the forefront of your work. You and the deputy headteacher work very closely together and I know that you have found her support and expertise invaluable.

Following the previous inspection, standards fell. In 2015, pupils' progress in reading was some of the lowest in the country. Pupils' progress in writing and mathematics was also below average. You and the school's other leaders ensured that this decline was not allowed to continue. Pupils' progress in reading and mathematics has climbed steadily over the last three years so that it is now similar to the national average.

You have very high aspirations for the school and this is a major factor in its ongoing improvement. Your school improvement document, which combines self-evaluation with improvement planning, is entitled 'route to outstanding'. This clear goal influences every decision you make. You and the governors have calculated the 'glide path' that you need to follow for the school to be judged to be outstanding by 2020. You know exactly what you need to do to get there.

The areas for improvement from the previous inspection have been tackled well.

The quality of teaching is continuing to improve and pupils make good progress from their individual starting points. You know that there is work still to do in order to achieve your ambition of making Burleigh an outstanding school, particularly around developing further the effectiveness of teaching and around improving the attendance of some pupils.

Burleigh is a happy school that pupils enjoy coming to. They enjoy their lessons and feel that they get the help they need to do well. Pupils are encouraged to become caring individuals and good citizens through the consistent messages they receive. For example, pupils know that Burleigh is a 'MAGIC' school where 'motivation, aspiration, gumption, integrity and communication' are key. This has helped to create a school where pupils are respectful to others, do their best and behave very well.

Few parents and carers responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. However, you have very recently completed your own survey of parents' opinions, using the same questions that Ofsted uses, and you shared these responses with me. The survey showed that the vast majority of the parents are very satisfied with the school. Three quarters of respondents gave a positive answer to every question. Particularly given the challenges that the school has faced over the last year and a half, it is testament to you and the deputy headteacher's strong leadership that you have retained the confidence of parents during these difficult times.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils feel safe at Burleigh Primary. They know that they can speak to any adult if they have worries or concerns, and they know that staff will help them. Pupils have been taught about bullying. They know how to recognise bullying and the different forms it can take. Pupils have great faith that teachers would sort out any bullying if it should occur.

The school's approach to the safer recruitment of staff is robust. Your single central record shows that all the required checks are carried out prior to individuals being allowed to start work at the school. Suitable arrangements are in place for reporting concerns about pupils and timely action is taken to protect pupils, where necessary. You took prompt and appropriate action when an allegation was raised about a member of staff.

Inspection findings

- In order to check whether the school remains good, I followed a number of lines of enquiry. First, I looked at the progress that pupils make in writing. I chose to focus on this area because, although progress was average in 2017, this represented a dip from the well above average progress the year before.
- You identified quickly, after taking over as headteacher, that assessment in writing was an area that needed more work. The deputy headteacher, as English leader, has ensured that teachers' assessments of pupils' writing are now more accurate. She has also changed the way that teachers plan their teaching of

writing so that they think more about what they want pupils to achieve by the end of a series of lessons. You have found this has made teaching more focused and that pupils' outcomes have improved as a result.

- The school's assessment information shows that pupils are making good progress throughout the school, and that some pupils are making rapid progress. The work in pupils' exercise books is of a good quality. In many cases pupils' handwriting is notably neat and tidy, with pupils developing an efficient, joined style by the time they leave the school.
- The second area that I looked at was whether the pupil premium grant is spent effectively. About half of the pupils in Year 6 in 2017 were eligible for free school meals. Of current pupils, between a quarter and a half of pupils are eligible for free school meals in every year group. This means that the pupil premium grant forms a sizeable proportion of the school's budget. Published data shows that disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to other pupils nationally overall.
- You and the school's governors monitor spending of the pupil premium grant regularly and carefully to ensure that spending is effective. As in every aspect of school life, your aspirations for, and your expectations of, this group of pupils are high. You and the governors arranged for a review of pupil premium funding to be carried out in order to check that you are using the grant effectively. Where recommendations for improvement were made, you are taking action in these areas. The school is also taking part in a project, arranged through the local authority, focused on improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. You have found this to be useful in helping you to further improve provision for this group.
- The school's assessment information and the work in pupils' books shows clearly that, throughout the school, disadvantaged pupils are making good progress. A small number of pupils are making rapid progress, particularly where teaching is strongest and most effective. You have recognised that in order to help the school to become outstanding, you now need to further improve the quality of teaching so that more pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make rapid progress.
- The final area that I focused on was attendance. Pupils' overall attendance has improved over the last three years. In 2017, it was similar to the national average. However, although there has been a slight reduction in persistent absence, this remains too high.
- You and the governors are well aware of this issue. You do a great deal to ensure that pupils attend school regularly and on time, and are largely successful. We looked at attendance information together, in some detail. It is clear that in some cases, there are genuine and justifiable reasons for pupils' high levels of absence from school. However, for other pupils this is not the case. For example, some parents have continued to take their children out of school for holidays during term time, despite your refusal to authorise such absence. In some cases, the issuing of fixed penalty notices has had little impact on preventing future absence of this nature. You are continuing to work on improving the attendance of individual pupils whose absence is too high.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching continues to improve so that more pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, make rapid progress
- attendance continues to improve, particularly for those pupils who are persistently absent from school.

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

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team. I also met with two governors and spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone. I met with a group of pupils and spoke with other pupils during the day. I took into account the results of Ofsted's online surveys: 20 responses to Parent View; 20 free-text comments; 49 pupil responses; and 23 staff responses. I also considered the 123 responses to the school's own survey of parents' opinions. I observed teaching and learning, jointly with you, in five classes. I looked at school documents including the single central record and other safeguarding documents