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Mrs N Morris  
Headteacher  
Hillside Primary School  
Rushey Way  
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Reading  
Berkshire  
RG6 4HQ

Dear Mrs Morris

### **Short inspection of Hillside Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 2 May 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 July 2014.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You are ably supported by your enthusiastic and ambitious senior leadership team. You have led the school effectively through a period of turbulence in staffing. The school's accurate self-evaluation identified correctly that standards in reading and writing were not high enough. You have appointed strong and effective staff to lead on these improvements.

The school's motto 'Inspiring the future' underpins your desire that every child should become a lifelong learner. The school's values of 'respect, collaboration, independence, resilience and learning' permeate throughout the school. Pupils work well together in lessons, they are thoughtful listeners and consider the ideas and views of one another respectfully and courteously. As one parent commented: 'Hillside School recognises the need to develop the children into well-rounded individuals through experiences such as its enrichment programme and its values such as collaboration. It strives to make the children happy and provide a positive learning environment.'

You have successfully addressed the areas the school needed to improve further following the last inspection. Pupils respond well to feedback provided to them by their teachers and take responsibility to show improvements in their work seriously. They are perceptive learners who appreciate the opportunity to assess their own work and respond positively to assessments of their work by their peers.

Members of the governing body have refined and honed their skills to enable them to carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively. Regular checks on the individual

skills that governors bring to the school support their ability to hold school leaders to account appropriately. They challenge and support school leaders well. Governors take time to visit the school to check whether the actions set out in the school improvement plan are being implemented according to the plan. Regular training and access to governor briefings enable governors to keep up to date with information. The governor with responsibility for school information on pupils' achievement provides effective challenge to school leaders. Reports to the full governing body ensure that all governors are appraised of accurate and relevant information about the attainment and progress of all groups of pupils across the school.

The work to improve standards in reading and writing is beginning to show a positive impact on pupils' learning across the school. You are fully aware that there is more to be done to make sure that all pupils, but particularly boys and disadvantaged pupils, are provided with the skills and abilities they need to acquire to enable them to read with interest, fluency and good comprehension. You have reviewed the way that phonics is being taught following the disappointing results in 2017. This is beginning to bear fruit and currently a higher proportion of pupils are on track to achieve the expected standard in the phonics screening check this year. The recent audit of the school's library stock revealed that much of the stock required updating. You have invested heavily in purchasing new and more relevant reading material for pupils, including texts that are appropriate for pupils with additional needs, such as dyslexia. As a result, pupils are eager to read the new books on offer.

Standards in writing are rising. This is because teachers are providing more opportunities for pupils to talk about their writing. They are making sure that pupils are deepening their understanding of language and make better use of a wider range of vocabulary. As a result, pupils' progress in writing has improved. But you know that there is more to be done to make sure that pupils' presentation and handwriting are consistently of high quality and that their spelling skills are secure.

Parents, staff and pupils who completed Ofsted questionnaires are overwhelmingly positive about the school. One parent's comment reflected the views of many, 'Great school with very caring staff that promote independence in children. Would recommend Hillside to any parent.'

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

School leaders have established a caring, nurturing and safe environment for pupils. Pupils say that they feel safe and understand that regular fire drills and lock-down procedures are designed to help them to know what to do if any emergency arose. Many parents who completed free-text responses to the Parent View questionnaire commented on the safe school environment. As one parent put it: 'The school is a warm, safe and welcoming environment. The relationship the staff have with the children is respectful, yet warm and encouraging.'

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You ensure that pupils in need of protection and those in challenging circumstances are supported well. Many parents commented positively about this

aspect of the school's work. Effective use is made of the skills of additional outside agencies to make sure that vulnerable pupils are kept safe. Staff are regularly updated on current safeguarding arrangements and all staff are suitably trained to understand their responsibilities to keep pupils safe from harm.

### **Inspection findings**

- You lead the school with passion, determination and ambition, to try to make sure that all pupils receive the very best all-round education. Your focus on the school values and developing pupils' personal skills, as well as supporting their academic achievement, means that pupils understand the importance of respecting the views of others. They become independent, resilient learners.
- Senior leaders have ensured that the curriculum is relevant and engaging for pupils. Enrichment days, trips to places of interest, such as Marwell Zoo and Reading Museum, and visits from people with particular skills and expertise enliven learning. The recent exploration of the Mayan civilization for Year 5 pupils linked learning in history, geography and English with the experience of learning to count in the Mayan language. Pupils and parents are positive about the use of the outdoor environment for learning. Pupils thoroughly enjoy learning in the Forest School.
- Improvements in standards of reading and writing are central to the strategic priorities for the school. In recent years, boys and disadvantaged pupils achieved less well than other groups of pupils. There is now a sharper focus on ensuring that all groups of pupils make good progress. School leaders have put additional support in place to help pupils with low starting points to make even better progress in order to catch up.
- Leaders with the responsibility for improving reading and writing standards have placed a renewed focus on ensuring that pupils are exposed to high-quality texts to support their understanding of vocabulary and improve their writing skills. Expectations have been raised and pupils are required to read regularly to an adult at home. In addition, reading sessions provide pupils with opportunities to share books together to encourage them to develop a love of reading. But there is more to be done to support lower-ability pupils, especially boys and disadvantaged pupils, to develop effective early reading skills.
- Pupils' progress in writing is improving. The school's own assessment information confirms this. Work seen in pupils' books shows that pupils are using a broader range of vocabulary to engage the reader in their writing. However, for many pupils, the quality of their handwriting and presentation is not good enough. Their spelling skills are underdeveloped.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils develop fluency and accuracy in their reading which inspires them to experience the joy and pleasure of reading

- pupils' presentation, handwriting and spelling skills improve so that they are consistently strong across the curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Ann Henderson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, your deputy headteacher and your senior leadership team, your reading and writing improvement teams, staff, pupils, the chair of the governing body and three governors. I had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. We observed learning together with your teaching and learning leader in five year groups. I observed phonics teaching in Year 1 with your deputy headteacher and your curriculum leader. I looked at work in pupils' books during these visits and carried out a more detailed scrutiny of some pupils' work with your early years leader and curriculum leader. I met with your school business manager to check the single central register and the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements. I heard four pupils read. I looked at the survey results from pupils, staff and parents, and considered the free-text comments that had been placed on Parent View. I considered the accuracy of your self-evaluation and looked at a range of other documentation, including information on pupils' achievement, the school development plan and external reports.