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Mr Kulvarn Atwal
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Atwal

Short inspection of Highlands Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 1 May 2018 with Clementina Aina, Ofsted Inspector, 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 January 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 specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a full section 5 inspection.

You, together with governors and leaders, have a clear vision and high aspirations for the school and its pupils. The school's status as a Unicef Rights Respecting School, together with your commitment to developing and promoting the school's values, has supported the school's success in many areas. This includes the development of a strong staff team where everyone is viewed as a leader. You have also developed effective links with organisations and schools within and beyond the United Kingdom so that you and your leaders are able to learn from and share useful ideas. Since the last inspection, there has been a significant upward trend in pupils' outcomes across the school.

Much of the school's success is also due to the successful use of research findings to help improve pupils' outcomes. Staff have access to high-quality training. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning has improved throughout the school. Pupils demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning. They are confident, enthusiastic and self-motivated. They are also proud of their school and of their achievements. Pupils

reported that in their school, 'Everyone has the chance to learn in their own way.' Most parents and carers are equally proud of the school and recognise the improvements that have been made.

You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Children in the early years are now provided with teaching and learning experiences that better develop their language, literacy and communication skills. This has ensured that the large majority of children achieve a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year.

You and other leaders have also ensured that pupils, including the most able, are set more challenging activities. This is to ensure that they achieve their very best. Over the last three years, the school has been in the top 10% of all schools nationally for pupils' progress in writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2. Although progress in reading has been less strong, it has improved significantly so that it is now in line with pupils' progress in writing and mathematics.

You are committed to ensuring that pupils achieve highly in, and have full access to, all subject areas. The curriculum is broad and well-considered so that pupils are able to participate in a wide range of learning experiences. Class reading texts link well to learning in other subject areas. For example, the reading of 'Cosmic' complemented pupils' studies into space exploration. This leads to high levels of pupil engagement in topic work. Academic subjects, together with physical, technological, creative and outdoor pursuits, are carefully matched to pupils' needs. Pupils visit places of interest, both in London and beyond, which gives them a strong sense of what it means to be a global citizen. Strong arts and sports programmes enable pupils to develop their confidence and self-esteem so that they are successful across a range of subjects.

Governors visit regularly so that they have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have a secure understanding of their statutory duties and fulfil these well. For example, they ask challenging questions in meetings and hold school leaders to account for pupils' progress. They have ensured that the pupil premium funding is spent wisely so that disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as other pupils nationally.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leadership team ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff and governors receive regular, thorough and up-to-date training. Staff are able to demonstrate the impact of training. For example, in discussions with inspectors, they described how they would spot the signs that pupils may need early help. They are familiar with the school's procedures and practices, particularly those regarding child protection. Staff work effectively in partnership with external agencies to ensure that pupils and their families receive the help that they need.

You, together with the other leaders, have established a strong culture of safeguarding and vigilance, in which pupils' safety is given a high priority. As a result,

pupils have a secure understanding of how to keep themselves safe in different situations. They regularly receive e-safety, road safety awareness and peer-to-peer bullying workshops. This helps them to feel and stay safe both in and out of school. Pupils reported that bullying is rare. Almost all parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, also say that pupils are well looked after and are kept safe in school.

Inspection findings

- We first agreed to look at the impact of leaders' work to ensure that the curriculum is meeting the needs of key stage 1 boys. This was because in 2016 and 2017, boys did not make as much progress in reading and writing as girls.
- You and your leaders are taking effective action to reduce gaps in outcomes between boys and girls. In the early years, staff have focused on developing boys' speaking and listening skills and this has led to them making stronger progress. Everyday resources such as 'pegs' and 'pots' act as prompts for discussion and make learning meaningful. This leads to boys developing the confidence to tackle new tasks.
- At key stage 1, teachers adapt the curriculum well to motivate and interest pupils, particularly boys, in the topics being taught. Attractive and stimulating book corners in each classroom, stocked with a wide range of fiction and non-fiction texts, encourage boys to develop a passion for reading. As one boy reported, 'The school has made reading more fun.'
- Teachers have a good understanding of the progress that boys are making. Effective teaching of phonics enables pupils, including boys, to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the unfamiliar 'igh' sound, for example. Teachers consistently use assessment information well to plan for pupils' next steps. This includes using teaching assistants to work with groups who require additional support. As a result, boys are now achieving as well as girls in their reading and writing.
- We next looked at the impact of leaders' work to further improve outcomes for the most able pupils in reading at the end of key stage 2. This was because, over the past three years, the most able pupils did not achieve the same strong outcomes in reading as they did in writing and mathematics.
- The teaching of the reading curriculum is having a more positive impact on the progress of the most able pupils. Teachers now ensure that the most able pupils have a secure understanding of the concepts being taught before they move on to new activities. In some classes, incisive questioning challenges pupils to think hard and to work out solutions to complex problems themselves.
- However, leaders agree that the teaching of reading skills is not always so effective. This leads to some of the most able pupils not achieving as well as they could. Hence, reading outcomes are still not as high as those achieved in writing and mathematics for the most able pupils.
- Finally, we looked at the effectiveness of leaders' actions to improve attendance and reduce persistent absenteeism. This is because over time, figures for

attendance and persistent absence have been lower than national averages.

- You and your leaders are taking effective steps to improve attendance and reduce persistent absenteeism, with actions focused on strengthening the school's strategy in this area. The use of teachers to support the school's work on attendance by meeting parents is having a significant impact on improving overall attendance rates. Leaders are also working effectively with external agencies to improve attendance, particularly for those pupils with medical and other needs. As a result, and compared to the same period last year, current school figures show that attendance is improving and persistent absenteeism is reducing.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of reading skills is consistently strong so that outcomes for the most able pupils are more in line with those achieved in writing and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Calvin Henry
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, the inspectors held meetings with you, your deputy headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and the school business manager. They met with all staff and parents at the beginning of the day. The lead inspector also met with governors and a representative from the local authority. The inspectors visited classes across the school. The inspectors had conversations with pupils during their lessons and at playtime, and listened to pupils in key stages 1 and 2 read. They also scrutinised pupils' work. The 24 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, together with the 63 pupil and 38 staff responses to questionnaires, were considered. The inspectors scrutinised a range of school documentation, including that relating to school self-evaluation and development planning, the school's assessment information and safeguarding policies and procedures.