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Mr Paul Cross
Headteacher
Hempstead Junior School
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Dear Mr Cross

Short inspection of Hempstead Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 20 June 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 October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You provide highly effective leadership for the school. Since you became substantive headteacher in September 2016, having previously been the deputy and then acting headteacher, you have created a strong sense of community and teamwork across the school. You and your deputy headteacher are a strong and effective team that has fostered a happy, calm atmosphere in which pupils learn and achieve well.

You, with governors, have worked hard to restore and secure the trust and confidence between leaders, staff, parents and governors which had been a cause for concern in the time since the previous inspection. One parent wrote: 'Mr Cross has really turned the school around, it's a safe and happy place for our children to attend.' The whole school community expressed their pride in the school. Staff morale is very high and staff are positive about all aspects of the school. Governors know the school well and have a good understanding of the school's strengths and priorities.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about your leadership and the school's provision for their children. One parent echoed the views of many with the comment: 'Excellent leadership at the school ensures that staff, pupils and parents have an outstanding relationship with each other. Nothing is ever too much for the staff and they put so much effort into teaching.'

Pupils thoroughly enjoy their time in school. A group agreed with one pupil who said: 'We like this school because every day you learn something new. It's fun and the teachers always help you.' Pupils are motivated and inspired by the vibrant, exciting curriculum. They particularly like the many trips and special events that enhance their learning and help develop their curiosity and enquiring minds. They flourish academically and in their personal development to become well-rounded individuals. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. They are friendly, polite and respectful of each other and adults. They embrace and live up to the school motto of 'Respect, Inspire, Achieve'.

You have been mindful of the priorities for improvement highlighted at the last inspection. For example, pupils have many opportunities to use and develop their writing skills across the curriculum. Along with this, your approach, which focuses on developing pupils' vocabulary prior to writing, resulted in pupils' achievement in writing by the end of Year 6 in 2017 being a strength in the school. Pupils made very good progress and the proportion of pupils achieving the expected and greater depth in writing was above that found nationally.

Effective monitoring by the leadership team and governors has enabled you to accurately identify aspects of the school's work that need further development. Your assessment system provides a detailed picture of pupils' achievement. This enables you to provide additional support when required so that all groups, including disadvantaged pupils, generally make good progress. You, your deputy and other leaders ensure that staff constantly strive to further improve their practice. Staff welcome opportunities to develop their expertise and knowledge, support each other and take part in research projects. Consequently, strong teaching enables pupils to achieve well. You correctly identified that pupils' achievement in reading was not as strong as that in writing. Your actions are beginning to have a positive impact and we agreed that there is more to do to further strengthen pupils' achievement in reading. You have also identified, as your development plan shows, improving the progress of the most able pupils and especially girls' achievement at a greater depth in mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have created a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. The inspection evidence agrees with the comment made by a parent: 'Mr Cross leads by example and it is very evident that the welfare of all pupils is paramount.' You, as the designated safeguarding leader, and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, all your policies are up to date and records are detailed and of high quality. Your policies now contain reference to protecting children from sexual exploitation, which had previously been omitted. All staff receive good-quality training. They know exactly the procedures to follow if they have any concerns and are vigilant in doing so.

Pupils said that they feel very safe in school and are confident to talk to staff if they have any problems. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves

safe in a range of situations, including online. All parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree that the school keeps their children safe and that they are well looked after. One commented: 'They go above and beyond what is expected from teachers and the open-door policy ensures that you are reassured at all times that your child is well looked after and safe.'

Inspection findings

- At the beginning of the inspection, as well as looking at the effectiveness of safeguarding, we agreed to focus on: pupils' achievement in reading; the progress and challenge for the most able pupils; the effectiveness of the governing body and how well governors and the headteacher work together; and the confidence of staff and governors in the school's leadership.
- In 2017, although just above the national figure, fewer pupils in the school met the expected standard in reading than in writing or mathematics. Teachers are helping pupils develop their stamina for reading and enriching their vocabulary, which were areas holding them back. You are also focusing on encouraging pupils to read for pleasure at school and at home. Pupils spoke to me with enthusiasm about their favourite authors and the types of books they like to read. One pupil said: 'I love reading because you can get stuck in to the world of your imagination.' You have reviewed your guided reading approach and are ensuring that high-quality questioning develops pupils' depth of understanding. The actions you are taking are having a positive impact on pupils' achievement, but you acknowledge that there remains more to be done.
- In 2017, the proportion of pupils reaching greater depth in their learning in writing was above that found nationally, and in reading and mathematics it was below. Pupils' work and your assessments indicate that the current most able pupils are mostly making good progress and achieve well. Teachers generally have high expectations and provide challenging work. On occasion, however, the most able pupils are not always challenged as fully as they might be. Occasionally, pupils do not have enough time to complete extended tasks or have sufficient opportunities to be resourceful and take the initiative in making decisions to extend the depth of their learning more effectively. You have correctly identified that there is scope to increase the number of pupils who excel in their learning.
- The governing body was restructured in July 2017 to provide governance for the federated infant and junior schools. Governance is now effective and all statutory monitoring duties are completed. Since your appointment, you have successfully established good communication with governors and worked in partnership with governors to forge trusting partnerships with shared vision and ambition. The governing body effectively holds you and other leaders to account for the school's performance. Previous issues have been eradicated.
- You have worked with unwavering determination and with great success to forge good and positive partnerships with staff and parents. Staff, in their response to Ofsted's survey, are very positive about all aspects of the school. All staff strongly agree that they feel motivated and respected by leaders and that the school is well led and managed. Parents are overwhelmingly positive. Many commented on

how much they appreciate the accessibility of you and your deputy headteacher. One parent wrote: 'He is everywhere, in after-school clubs, on the playground, on school trips, at the fairs, even sorting out the lost and found box! The most involved headteacher I have ever seen.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' achievement in reading continues to improve
- the most able pupils are consistently provided with sufficient challenge to further develop their depth of knowledge and understanding, particularly in reading and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Margaret Coussins
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and your deputy headteacher and other senior leaders in the school. I also met with the chair of the governing body and two other governors and the local authority adviser. You and the deputy headteacher accompanied me on my visits to classes. I talked with pupils during lessons and looked at the work in their books. I observed pupils arriving at school in the morning and during lunchtime and asked them for their views on the school. I also spoke with members of the school council. I took account of 43 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 24 free-text comments. I also spoke with parents at the start of the school day. I reviewed the school's website and sampled a range of documents and records, including information about pupils' achievement, the school's development plan and documents relating to safeguarding. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness.