

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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30 November 2018

Mr Ryan Driver  
Headteacher  
Halfway Houses Primary School  
Danley Road  
Minster-on-Sea  
Kent  
ME12 3AP

Dear Mr Driver

### **Short inspection of Halfway Houses Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 13 November 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in April 2015.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Together with the deputy headteacher, other senior leaders and governors, you have led the school through some significant changes since the last inspection. In October 2016, the school moved into brand-new, purpose-built accommodation on a different site, and in November of the same year the school became an academy. Over the last three years, there have been numerous changes in staff and the school's roll has increased considerably. You have successfully maintained the strength in pupils' learning and progress and ensured that they continue to achieve well. The new building provides a spacious and motivating environment and is clearly appreciated by all pupils.

The school is now part of The Island Learning Trust (TILT), a multi-academy trust (MAT) currently comprising two Isle of Sheppey primary schools. The two schools work closely together. The headteacher of the other primary school is the chief executive officer and the two schools share a governing body. In September, you started working with a new curriculum, specifically devised for the MAT, which is known as the TILT curriculum.

You are ambitious for pupils to achieve well and make good progress academically. You also place a strong emphasis on developing pupils' confidence, aspirations and self-esteem, as well as enriching their experience. One parent commented: 'The confidence that my daughter has gained is evident at home as well as in school and we are all benefiting from this.' Halfway Houses is a happy school where everyone is welcome and able to achieve. You set great store on working with parents and carers

and strive to engage all your families. Parents are generally positive and supportive of the school. One parent commented: 'The school has a real community feel and there are lots of opportunities to visit school and be involved with special events.'

You are mindful of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection of your predecessor school. The actions you have taken to improve teaching and learning, for example, have led to pupils' improved achievement. This is particularly evident in pupils' outcomes at the end of key stage 2. Improvement is also evident, although less marked, in the 2018 outcomes at end of key stage 1. Current pupils are making good progress from their starting points, which are generally below those typical for their age when they start in Reception Year. You acknowledge, however, that teachers' expectations for what pupils can achieve are not consistently high enough.

Senior leaders and governors have a clear view of the school's strengths and its areas for development. The work of governors is sharply focused as they have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They have the skills and expertise to challenge leaders to improve the school further. Your ambition, vision and determination to put the needs of pupils first are shared by all leaders, staff and governors. There is a strong culture of inclusion and an unwavering commitment to meeting the needs of all pupils. There are mutually beneficial links between the staff of both primary schools within the MAT. These result in the sharing of skills and expertise, in effective training and mentoring, and the spreading of good practice alongside the development of leaders. Your deputy headteacher is highly effective in leading on the development of your middle leaders and has correctly identified that there is scope to strengthen the impact of their work.

Pupils enjoy school and develop positive attitudes to learning. One parent summarised the views of many, writing: 'Our children love coming to school and enjoy all their lessons.' Pupils said they appreciate the space and the learning opportunities in the new building. They are polite, friendly and respectful, behaving well and showing care and consideration towards each other. There are strong, positive relationships between pupils and teachers. As a result, pupils want to do well and are proud of their achievements. They are not afraid to have a go, take risks and learn from their mistakes because they know their efforts will be respected and valued. A group of pupils agreed when one pupil said that teachers 'help us do things that we didn't think we could do'.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team ensures that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All staff receive effective training on all the required aspects of safeguarding to keep pupils safe from a variety of risks. Statutory recruitment checks are completed on all adults before they start working at the school. Staff know the pupils very well. This, along with their training, enables them to be vigilant in identifying and reporting any concerns to the designated safeguarding lead. If a concern is raised, swift action is taken. There is effective liaison with other agencies, when necessary, so that pupils and their families receive timely and effective support.

Pupils say they feel safe and happy in school and that adults look after them well. They said they are confident to talk to staff should a problem arise. Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree that the school keeps their children safe, and that they are happy and well looked after. One parent wrote: 'My child is now thriving socially as well as academically. He feels safe and secure here, with a thirst to learn.'

You work extremely hard to encourage pupils' regular attendance and, last year, overall attendance was above the national figure. You and other leaders are relentless in your support for families, particularly where pupils are persistently absent. Your actions have reduced the proportion of pupils with poor attendance, although this remains higher than the national figure.

### **Inspection findings**

- At the start of the inspection we agreed to look at: the progress of different groups of pupils; progress in reading including the progress of disadvantaged pupils; pupils' achievement in key stage 1; and the effectiveness of safeguarding.
- Senior leaders have a clear overview of the progress of different groups of pupils across the school, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and disadvantaged pupils. You check on the progress of individuals in your regular pupils' progress meetings and provide appropriate additional support if required. Monitoring accurately informs you about the progress rates of different groups. Actions taken as a result of this monitoring are having a positive impact. For example, carefully selected texts are motivating all pupils but particularly boys. These texts ensure that reading has an influence on pupils' writing abilities. Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND are given strong support to improve and the progress of these groups is strengthening. However, you acknowledge that leaders need to monitor the delivery of the new curriculum to ensure that teachers consistently meet the needs of all groups, and have the highest expectations for pupils' achievement.
- You have worked hard to improve reading throughout the school. Pupils' progress in reading was not as strong as their progress in writing and mathematics. Rightly, it continues to be a priority for further improvement. Most pupils, of all ages, are enthusiastic readers. You have promoted reading for enjoyment very successfully. Pupils demonstrated this in their discussions with me. They are very motivated by the online reading programme which checks their comprehension and determines the level of difficulty of the book they should read next. Your initiative to open the library in the mornings before school and at breaktimes and lunchtimes has helped to spark pupils' interest and engagement with reading. In class, pupils benefit from the small group sessions with their teachers or teaching assistants. Increasingly, pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are making stronger progress in reading.
- Your relentless focus on improving teaching and learning has had a significant impact on raising pupils' achievement by the end of key stage 2. By the end of Year 6, in 2018, the proportion of pupils who attained the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was above the national average. The proportion

who achieved the higher standard was also above that found nationally. This was a much-improved picture compared to 2017 outcomes. By the end of key stage 1, in 2018, the proportion of pupils who attained the expected standard was at the national average in reading, above in writing and below in mathematics. Pupils had made steady progress from their starting points. Appropriately, improving teaching and learning continue to be key priorities.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there are consistently high expectations for what all groups of pupils can achieve within the new curriculum
- the role of middle leaders develops so that their work has a greater impact on pupils' outcomes and the quality of teaching and learning.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi-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

Margaret Coussins  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher. I also met with other leaders in the school. I had meetings with members of the governing body and the chief executive officer of TILT. You or your deputy headteacher accompanied me on visits to classes. During these visits, I spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at their work. I spoke to pupils around the school and in the playground, asking them for their views on the school. I discussed reading with a group of pupils.

I reviewed the school's website and sampled a range of documents and records including: your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness; the school improvement plan; information about pupils' achievement; and documents relating to safeguarding. I took into account 139 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 64 free-text comments. I spoke with some parents in the playground at the start of the day and spoke with one parent on the telephone. I also considered 11 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.