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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Sue Kenneth
Headteacher
The Highway Primary School
The Highway
Orpington
Kent
BR6 9DJ

Dear Mrs Kenneth

Short inspection of The Highway Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 December 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 March 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Leaders' commitment to securing pupils' academic success is tangible. They ensure that teaching inspires pupils to work hard and aim high. As a result, pupils attain well, particularly in mathematics and key stage 1. As one pupil commented: 'We do well in this school because teachers make sure we do our best.' Parents and carers who responded to Parent View are supportive of the school's work, praising its 'welcoming' and 'friendly' ethos.

Leaders know the school's strengths and areas that could be better. You and your deputy headteacher form a strong team. Well-focused plans for improvement reflect the culture of high expectations. For instance, leaders have taken effective steps to improve pupils' progress in writing, following disappointing outcomes in the 2018 key stage 2 assessments. When leaders act, improvement follows swiftly. Current pupils are making good progress. However, some aspects of the teaching of writing need strengthening, for instance in relation to the development of pupils' handwriting skills.

You have a motivated team of staff, including middle leaders, who share your determination to ensure that pupils fulfil their potential. To achieve this aim, leaders and teachers keep a close eye on how well pupils learn. Through their use of high-quality assessment information, teachers are quick to identify and support pupils who have fallen behind. The school's approach in this area is a strength. Alongside this, leaders and staff work effectively with other schools within the multi-academy trust to learn from what is working well. Staff spoke highly of how this enables

them to develop their teaching and leadership skills. Morale is good because staff feel well supported. They know that leaders' decisions are shaped by appropriate consideration for their well-being as well as what is in pupils' best interests.

Your focus on academic rigour is matched with strong provision for pupils' development as well-rounded individuals. The rich curriculum contributes well to this work. For instance, pupils told me how much they enjoy taking part in the extra-curricular activities on offer, including yoga and choir. Pupils also benefit from many opportunities to take on leadership roles such as house captains and peer mediators. These roles develop important skills such as team work, which pupils recognise will serve them well in the future. Pupils are proud of their school, as their considerate and sensible conduct shows. You have recently introduced a new approach to promoting high standards of behaviour, including training for staff. Pupils were positive about the difference this approach has made. They told me that staff deal with any incidents in 'a fair and proportionate way'.

Governors are closely involved in school life, providing leaders with well-targeted support and challenge. For instance, you and the governing body have found ways to maintain high standards in reading, writing and mathematics without compromising the provision for pastoral care or in other subjects, such as specialist teaching in modern foreign languages and music.

Safeguarding is effective.

The strong safeguarding culture is centred on adults' in-depth knowledge of each pupil. Staff are knowledgeable about different risks, including peer-on-peer abuse and cyber bullying, and know what signs to look out for. You and your team are highly alert to changes in pupils' behaviour or circumstances. Leaders consider carefully if these changes indicate pupils' welfare is at risk. Close partnerships with parents mean that leaders acquire a full picture of pupils' needs. Leaders are thorough in their work to make sure that pupils receive effective extra help when it is needed. They do not hesitate to challenge external agencies so that vulnerable pupils and families receive the right level of support at the right time.

Strong pastoral care means pupils feel safe. Pupils told me that the school is 'friendly', 'teachers are kind' and that they 'never feel lonely'. They appreciate how staff know them very well and are quick to help them if they feel unhappy. Pupils have suitable opportunities to learn how to stay safe, including when they use the internet. Through the school's work with national safeguarding charities, pupils understand the importance of speaking out if they feel unsafe or worried. All parents who responded to the Parent View survey agreed that their children feel safe in school.

Inspection findings

- The first area I considered was pupils' writing outcomes in key stage 2. This was because the 2018 Year 6 cohort made considerably less progress in writing during key stage 2 compared to pupils in other schools.

- You and your team reviewed the reasons why pupils did not make good progress. You identified that, although pupils have a secure knowledge of grammar, punctuation and spelling, they were not routinely making use of this in their writing. In response, leaders have introduced a number of strategies so that this aspect of pupils' writing development is not overlooked.
- Crucially, teachers have raised their expectations. They share these effectively with pupils through 'non-negotiables'. This means that pupils know what to include in their writing. Teachers check that pupils edit their work so that their writing is grammatically accurate, and words are spelled correctly. Work in pupils' books and school information show that the changes you have made are proving successful. Current pupils are making good progress. However, further work is needed to make sure that these improvements are fully embedded.
- Alongside the focus on spelling, grammar and punctuation, teachers make sure that pupils enjoy writing. Stimulating topics and texts, both in English and other subjects, capture pupils' interests. One pupil, summing up the views of many, said: 'I like writing because teachers make sure we write about something fun.' Teachers challenge pupils to use ambitious vocabulary and provide well-chosen resources to support pupils who are less confident in doing so. Similarly, teachers ensure that pupils routinely read suitably demanding books, both in class and for pleasure. Pupils told me how this helps them to think of words and ideas they can use in their own writing.
- The second area I focused on was the quality of the early years provision and how effectively it prepared children for Year 1. In 2018, the proportion of children attaining a good level of development was broadly similar to the national average. However, boys did not do as well as girls. Leaders told me that this was a key priority for the school.
- Leaders have made important changes to the early years provision, including redeveloping the outdoor area so it is vibrant and spacious. Opportunities for children to learn outside are as effective as those provided inside. Additionally, leaders have strengthened arrangements for when children join the school. Staff obtain detailed information on every child and plan how best to support them make a smooth start to the Reception Year. This, together with adults' high expectations, mean that children settle quickly, behave well and develop positive attitudes to their learning.
- The teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) is particularly strong. Adults have excellent subject knowledge and provide tasks which are effective in developing children's early reading skills. While the provision offers plenty of activities and resources to encourage children to write and, in turn, apply their phonics knowledge, boys are not using them enough. More needs to be done to ensure that boys are motivated to write as much as girls.
- I also checked whether the boys who had fallen behind at the end of the Reception year were making up for lost ground in Year 1. As with the Reception class, phonics teaching is strong. This is reflected in pupils' above-average attainment in the national phonics screening check. Teachers are highly aware of pupils' gaps in knowledge and plan teaching to target these effectively. However, some pupils' progress in writing is impeded because they have difficulties forming

letters correctly. Sometimes, pupils practise their writing skills sitting on the carpet or using whiteboards. This prevents them from developing a good pencil grip and knowing how to position their hands when forming letters. Leaders plan to address this through the implementation of a new policy for handwriting and presentation. This work is recent, and it is too soon to judge the impact.

- For the last three years, pupils' progress in mathematics during key stage 2 has been considerably above the national average. Therefore, the final area I considered was how leaders and staff had achieved this success.
- The mathematics curriculum is demanding. Teachers know exactly which concepts should be taught and when to promote pupils' progress. They plan learning so that all pupils can be successful, with well-targeted tasks that both stretch and consolidate pupils' understanding. As one pupil put it: 'Mathematics teaching is challenging, and I like to be challenged.' When pupils find a concept hard, teachers adapt resources and activities accordingly, so pupils do not develop gaps in their knowledge. For instance, pupils use diagrams and pictures to help them grasp different concepts and calculation methods.
- Teachers' strong subject knowledge means that they model vocabulary accurately and expect pupils to use this language when they discuss their work. Pupils of all abilities benefit from plentiful opportunities to reason mathematically and explain their thinking. This is effective because it means that pupils not only understand how to work out an answer but why a method was successful. Pupils enjoy mathematics because of this, including how teachers help them 'to find new ways to work out an answer'.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- resources and activities in the early years provision increase boys' motivation to write
- in the early years and key stage 1, teaching enables pupils to develop a neat and fluent handwriting style at the earliest possible stage
- in key stage 2, teachers maintain a sharp focus on making sure that pupils routinely use their knowledge of grammar, punctuation and spelling in their writing.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bromley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Murphy-Dutton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust and other senior leaders. I also met with members of the governing body. I visited classrooms together with leaders and looked at samples of pupils' work. I met with two groups of pupils from Year 2 and Year 6 and listened to them read. I also spoke to pupils informally throughout the inspection and took account of the 16 responses to Ofsted's survey for pupils. The views of parents were considered through the 83 responses to Parent View, including written comments. Formal and informal discussions were held with staff and the 16 responses to the staff survey were reviewed. I also looked at a range of school documentation, including safeguarding records.