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31 January 2019

Mr David Sherhod
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Sherhod

Short inspection of Ightham Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 17 January 2019, 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 February 2015.

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 section 5 inspection.

Together with your leadership team, you have successfully raised the expectations of staff and pupils and, at the same time, created a nurturing and welcoming school culture. Parents are highly appreciative of the quality of care and education provided by the school. One parent who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, wrote: 'We are very lucky to have this local and friendly school. It gives all the children a great foundation for the very competitive years ahead and for the journey into adult life.'

Pupils love coming to school, as shown by their low rates of absence. They behave very well in lessons and around the school. Pupil 'umpires' help to sort out any minor squabbles in the playground. Pupils are unfailingly polite to visitors, wear their uniforms with pride and speak enthusiastically about their learning. They value and make effective use of the help they get from their teachers. One pupil said, 'We know what we have to do to improve.'

Since the previous inspection, outcomes have continued to improve and are now

consistently well above average in all key stages. The proportion of children in the early years who achieve a good level of development has been well above average for the last two years. Similarly, the proportion of pupils in Year 1 who achieve the expected standard in the phonics screening check is well above the national figure. Pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at key stages 1 and 2 is very high, with a larger proportion than found nationally achieving at greater depth or the higher standard.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to improve further the quality of teaching and to develop the role of subject leaders in school improvement. You have worked tirelessly to address both of these areas. Teaching is now much stronger because you have invested in additional training for teachers and hold them closely to account for the progress their pupils make. Teachers have benefited from expert support, for example observing outstanding practice in other schools. Teachers work together to plan schemes of work, moderate assessment and coach each other to develop their practice. Crucially, they share your vision for an engaging and challenging curriculum and have exceptionally high expectations of what their pupils can do.

Subject leaders now take full responsibility for the areas they manage. They have undertaken appropriate training and are passionate about their subjects. They feel valued by you and repay this trust by investing considerable energy into their work, ensuring that pupils have the very best curriculum experience possible.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils' well-being and welfare lie at the heart of all that the school does. Leaders make careful checks on the suitability of all who work or volunteer in the school. Governors check that leaders implement agreed safeguarding policies fully. Staff and governors participate in regular safeguarding training that is compliant with all current regulations and guidance. As a result, staff are vigilant and know what to do if they are concerned about a pupil.

If a concern is raised, leaders always act on it promptly. Where leaders decide that it is necessary to involve outside services, they are tenacious in ensuring that referrals are followed up and that the child and family receive appropriate support.

Leaders ensure that pupils are protected when online, by teaching them about the safe use of the internet. Leaders also place detailed information about child protection, including online safety, on the school's website so that parents and carers also understand the risks.

Inspection findings

- At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed to focus on some key areas of the school's work. As well as safeguarding and the impact of actions taken since the last inspection, we explored: how well teachers and leaders challenge pupils to achieve their very best; how the school uses enrichment and other opportunities

to ensure that pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain; and the impact of governance on school improvement.

- Your subject leaders have refined the curriculum over the last four years, so that it provides greater levels of challenge than previously and sparks pupils' curiosity. A well-structured and practical approach to science education successfully enables pupils to think and write scientifically. For example, pupils in Years 5 and 6, carrying out investigations, were required to wrestle with challenging scientific concepts. They displayed great resilience, a genuine thirst for knowledge and a secure understanding of fair tests. They recorded their predictions, findings and conclusions carefully and were able to reflect with insight on what they had learned.
- In mathematics, the curriculum is highly successful in developing pupils' fluency, reasoning and problem-solving skills. Year 3 pupils, learning to tell the time, were further challenged by using clock faces that used Roman numerals. In English, pupils gain excellent reading comprehension skills as well as the ability to write accurately. They use a wide vocabulary and write in a variety of genres. Workbooks demonstrate that pupils in key stage 2 have, over time, developed a very strong understanding of how to enhance their writing by the well-judged use of grammatical features and literary techniques.
- Throughout the school, teachers make skilful use of questioning and stretching tasks to provide high levels of challenge. In the Reception class, adults intervened appropriately in children's play to move their learning forward. As an example, one adult asked a group of pupils building a house, 'What size bricks do we need?' In history, teachers make full use of the rich history of the locality to bring the past to life.
- Pupils in all year groups greatly enjoy their outdoor lessons. These open-air sessions complement and enhance pupils' speaking, writing and understanding in a number of subjects. They also provide a rich context for teamwork and creativity.
- Pupils take huge pride in their work and the majority, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged, make very strong progress from their starting points. However, work in exercise books shows that a very small number of most-able pupils, while making strong progress overall, do not yet respond to tasks with the depth and detail needed to achieve the very highest scores in national tests.
- Religious education and personal, social, health and economics (PSHE) education prepare pupils very well for life in modern Britain. One pupil said that in their school, 'All people are accepted, no matter what country they come from.' Pupils raised significant sums of money to support a building project in the village in Malawi with which the school is linked. Pupils are also encouraged to develop into active citizens through membership of the eco-council, which recently secured the Green Flag Gold award, and the school council.
- You have ensured that the curriculum is enriched with high-quality opportunities for pupils to develop their skills, aptitudes and interests. You are rightly proud of the school's exceptionally strong record in competitive sport. Pupils also relish opportunities to learn to play musical instruments, take part in drama productions

and join in the many fascinating clubs on offer.

- Governors are committed to the school and, through well-run committees, exercise effective oversight of safeguarding, standards and finance. They hold leaders stringently to account for pupils' progress and do not take what they are told at face value. They use reports from external advisers and their own visits to the school to verify what leaders tell them.
- Governors take their responsibilities as stewards of the school extremely seriously. They ensure that their own training is up to date and have developed a credible succession plan for governance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- an even greater proportion of the most able pupils have the skills, knowledge and understanding to achieve the highest scores in English and mathematics, by the end of key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Gary Holden
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, you and I carried out visits to all classes. I also held meetings with you and members of your leadership team to discuss pupils' progress and review a sample of pupils' work. I met with the chair of governors and two other members of the governing body, and also spoke to your local authority's improvement adviser. I reviewed a wide range of documentation that you made available to me, including your self-evaluation and school improvement plan. I also reviewed the school's policies and procedures for safeguarding. I spoke with two groups of pupils and spoke informally with parents at the start of the day. I took account of 82 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 77 written comments. I also considered 18 responses to the staff survey and 26 to the pupil survey.