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Mrs Susan Pye-Beraet
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Dear Mrs Pye-Beraet

Short inspection of King's Court First School

Following my visit to the school on 12 February 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 March 2015.

Based on the evidence available during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In the light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness of good as a result of this inspection.**

Since the previous inspection, you have successfully led the school through a time of significant change. Leaders have worked hard to improve provision for children in the early years further. Your sterling work to develop the outdoor environment ensures that children enjoy a good range of activities to support all areas of their learning. As a result, children make good progress, attaining standards that are consistently above the national figures. However, leaders, at all levels, have not sufficiently improved provision in key stages 1 and 2. At the end of the last inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that pupils were given clear guidance on how to improve their work so that even more pupils attain better standards. This area for improvement has not been fully addressed. Although pupils in key stages 1 and 2 receive guidance on how to improve their work, it is, in most classes, too general and provides insufficient levels of challenge, particularly for the most able pupils.

Pupils say that they love coming to King's Court because they like learning new things. They enjoy their lessons, although older pupils said that in most subjects the work could be harder. Pupils greatly value the times when adults read stories to them. They excitedly recalled lessons when a teacher 'puts on a really good voice'. One pupil, who was less enthusiastic about reading, acknowledged that, 'It is good

when the teacher reads. She reads with, actually, very good expression.' Pupils enjoy attending the extra-curricular activities, such as the country dancing and the breakfast club. However, they said that they would like to have a greater range of clubs available to them as 'lots of people don't do anything'. Pupils correctly identify the friendliness of staff and their peers as real strengths of the school. Every pupil spoken to during the inspection confidently identified an adult they would talk to if they had a problem. Your vision of 'caring, sharing and learning together' provides the ethos and rationale for all that you do at King's Court. Pupils rightly say that they are well cared for and get on well together.

Since joining the school, in September 2017, you have worked tirelessly to be highly visible and approachable to pupils, staff and parents. This determination is recognised and appreciated by the vast majority of the school's community. The strength of the pastoral support that is offered to pupils at King's Court fully reflects the school's vision. Parents were, rightly, effusive about the school's care for their children. Even though a sizeable minority of parents had concerns about the progress their children are making, they were keen to recognise senior leaders' friendliness and approachability. Many parents commented positively on the ethos and practice of the school, recognising how these have built their children's confidence. One parent stated: 'I honestly could not feel happier with the care my child has received. She is blossoming.'

School leaders' actions successfully ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported in their academic and emotional development. Disadvantaged pupils are usually well supported as a result of the pastoral care they receive. They say that they are happy and confident at school and feel safe. However, this group of pupils does not receive sufficient support to enable them to catch up with their peers. As a result, current disadvantaged pupils are not achieving as well as they could.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is at the top of leaders' and governors' agendas at all times. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. The designated safeguarding lead and governors are well trained and up to date with the latest guidance. Staff know and understand their responsibilities well. For example, staff understand the importance of early intervention to keep pupils safe. As a result, they promptly report concerns at the earliest stage so that leaders can intervene to prevent problems becoming more serious.

Leaders work systematically and methodically to ensure that pupils receive the pastoral support they need. For example, records of behaviour incidents are checked regularly by the headteacher, who takes appropriate action to address any underlying causes of poor behaviour. In addition, leaders make good use of external agencies, working with various professionals to support the diverse needs of families. Leaders have worked hard to ensure that pupils attend school regularly. They have built good relationships with families, identifying problems and working

together to find solutions. Consequently, the attendance of many pupils is improving and the school's overall attendance is broadly average.

All pupils said that they feel safe at school. They acknowledge that sometimes they argue with each other but recognise that this is not bullying. Pupils were clear that there is no bullying at King's Court. Every pupil agreed that if bullying did occur, adults would help to resolve the problem. Pupils spoke confidently about how to keep themselves safe. This included: not leaving school without an adult; not talking to strangers; being careful about what they type into a search engine; and the importance of having an adult supervise them when they use the internet.

Inspection findings

- My first key line of enquiry focused on the impact of actions taken by senior leaders to improve standards of writing, throughout the school. This was a focus because writing standards have fallen to well below the national average at the end of key stage 1. At the end of foundation stage, in 2018, a smaller proportion of children attained the early learning goal in writing, compared to the other early learning goals. Jointly with school leaders, I observed lessons and looked at a range of pupils' work in their books.
- Senior leaders have correctly identified that the quality of provision in the early years, including writing, is an area for development. They have provided training and support for all early years staff. I found that the actions leaders have taken to improve provision in the Reception class have been effective. Classrooms and the newly refurbished outdoor area provide a stimulating and well-equipped learning environment, with lots of writing opportunities. These include challenges to extend children's writing to full sentences, wherever possible. As a result, children in the Reception class are writing frequently and making good progress.
- In key stages 1 and 2, pupils also practise writing regularly and their work is, broadly, appropriate for their age. However, leaders have not made their expectations sufficiently clear to staff and, as a result, the improvements that leaders planned have not been implemented consistently throughout the school. In particular, the most able pupils are not given sufficient challenge to enable them to make good progress in writing. While all books are regularly marked, teachers do not adhere to the school's recently revised marking policy. Consequently, the guidance given to pupils is not always effective. Too many pupils do not know how to improve their work. Where teaching is strongest, the assessment of what individual pupils need to learn next is sharp and lessons are carefully planned to challenge every pupil appropriately. Where teaching is weaker, the guidance given to pupils does not support them to make good progress. Teachers' expectations of all pupils are not high enough. As a result, the current pupils in key stages 1 and 2 are not making good progress and too few pupils are achieving the higher standards.
- My second line of enquiry focused on the impact of leaders' actions to support pupils to achieve the higher standards, particularly in reading (including phonics) and mathematics. This was a focus because pupils' achievement, particularly at

the higher standard, is declining. I found that phonics is taught and assessed regularly and that pupils make good progress. Leaders have taken effective action to improve the level of challenge provided to pupils in mathematics. Pupils regularly solve problems of increasing difficulty and, where teaching is strongest, record their reasoning. There is evidence of pupils making strong progress in mathematics in a few classes. However, this is not consistent across the school. In reading, some teachers carefully assess and monitor pupils' progress, but this practice is not evident in all classes. Where teaching is weaker, activities for pupils, particularly the most able, are not sufficiently matched to their learning needs and do not provide enough stretch and challenge. Consequently too few pupils are achieving the higher standards.

- My third line of enquiry focused on whether pupils enjoy a broad and balanced curriculum that provides opportunities to extend their learning and enables a greater proportion to achieve the higher standards. School leaders have written a clear rationale for the King's Court curriculum and have based this firmly on the school's values, the King's Court 'crown jewels'. You have chosen a curriculum that has been adopted by other local schools to promote collaborative learning. You are working to ensure that pupils' learning covers a wide range of subjects. However, you rightly acknowledge that, because of your determination to improve standards in writing, pupils do not always receive the planned broad and enriched curriculum. Although the school's current art exhibition provides evidence of rich art provision, this high standard of work is not consistent for all subjects. For instance, pupils told me that they used to do music regularly but they could not think of any recent musical experiences, other than learning a song together.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- effective action is taken to improve the teaching of writing so all pupils make strong progress
- teachers provide sufficient challenge in all subjects so that greater proportions of pupils achieve the higher standards
- the new curriculum is fully implemented and pupils are challenged and inspired by its breadth and richness.

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

Yours sincerely

Clare Morgan
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Together with the headteacher, I visited lessons in Reception, key stage 1 and key stage 2. I spoke to pupils and examined work in their exercise books. I held meetings with the headteacher and the assistant headteacher. I met with three members of the governing body. I took account of 51 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 25 free-text comments. I considered nine responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 41 responses to the pupil survey. A range of documents was reviewed, including: the school's development plan; leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness; the school's single central record; information about pupils' achievement; records of action taken to support pupils' needs; records of attendance; and minutes of the governing body's meetings.