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Mrs Babiche Deysel
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Deysel

Short inspection of Petham Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 July 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 May 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, led by your determination, share the aspiration that pupils will flourish. The school's motto, 'kindness, respect, tolerance', is understood by all members of the school community, and is currently being developed further to include 'resilience'.

The local governing body, along with the multi-academy trust (MAT), has been restructured recently to ensure that there is greater accountability and challenge for all levels of leadership. In addition, there have been changes in the school's leadership structure as part of this reorganisation. A minority of parents and carers have raised a concern that these changes will affect the quality of provision at Petham Primary School.

The previous inspection recognised strengths in leadership, teaching, pupils' achievements, behaviour and the early years. These strengths have been sustained. Providing more opportunities for pupils to be resourceful and work things out for themselves is a focus for improvement from the last inspection. The school's curriculum has been broadened. Pupils have a wide range of first-hand experiences, within which they work together and share their skills to solve problems. For example, pupils create animations and take part in science and cookery challenges with other schools. Raising standards in writing was also identified as an area for improvement at the last inspection. Staff have had training to develop the teaching of writing further and opportunities to work alongside colleagues from other schools. Pupils' writing is linked to carefully chosen topics, which provide them with

opportunities to write for different purposes and audiences. As a result, pupils are making better progress in writing, with many exceeding age-related expectations.

Leaders and governors have developed effective approaches to ensure that the school continues to improve. Their development plans outline appropriate targets with a corresponding programme of actions that are paced thoughtfully. Collectively, you have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Pupils' progress is in line with national averages. Nonetheless, you have recognised that more needs to be done to ensure that pupils are challenged consistently to achieve the higher standards.

Together, leaders and governors review the progress of the school development plan to ensure that resources are used successfully to raise standards. Governors visit the school regularly to talk to leaders, look at pupils' work and make visits to the classrooms. However, as we discussed, governors need to develop their confidence to ask leaders more rigorous, probing questions.

The broad and exciting curriculum includes opportunities for pupils to visit a range of venues in the wider community and listen to speakers who are invited into school. These opportunities are appreciated by pupils. For example, pupils visit the home of the author Alexis Deacon as part of their literacy lessons, and Dover Castle when learning about the Second World War in history. Pupils develop their creative skills when they work alongside professional musicians and artists in school, as part of special events.

During visits to classrooms, we saw that pupils are attentive and keen to learn. Staff provide pupils with varied activities to ensure that most pupils learn effectively. We observed some pupils working together to solve multi-step problems that involved various units of measurement and other pupils solving problems with algebra. Learning about pirates, Reception children created treasure maps and wrote messages enthusiastically to go inside bottles. Key stage 1 pupils enjoyed using their feet and arms to make different musical rhythms successfully. Staff ask questions that help pupils to deepen their understanding, and they model how to approach tasks to help pupils who are stuck. One pupil said: 'Staff explain things clearly using the whiteboard. They ask us if we understand, if not they go through it again.' As a result of effective teaching, most pupils across the school are making strong progress.

Staff look after pupils well and know them as individuals. Pupils, along with their families, are provided with a range of support when needed. The effectiveness of this help is reviewed closely to make sure pupils participate well in all aspects of school life. One parent stated: 'Teachers teach all children as individuals and help is given where needed, to help them flourish.' Staff work together closely to support pupils and pastoral support is a strength of the school.

Pupils speak happily and articulately about their experiences in school. They are polite and respectful towards each other. The majority of pupils behave very well and are keen to learn. They appreciate the ways in which their teachers help them to learn. However, some pupils say that they would like to be challenged more.

Staff provide a wide variety of extra-curricular activities. Pupils welcome the opportunity to attend clubs such as: girls' football and cricket; drama; gardening; gymnastics; literacy; and to play in the orchestra. Pupils participate regularly in competitive events with other schools, such as multi-sports, basketball and the eco-car challenge. These activities help pupils learn to work together collaboratively and to win and lose gracefully. All of these activities support pupils' personal development and learning effectively.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose. Staff take part in regular safeguarding training. Consequently, staff know what to do when they have a concern about a pupil's well-being, and that they must act swiftly. Leaders work together as a team, have regular meetings and ensure that safeguarding records are up to date. The family liaison officer, together with other leaders, works with a variety of external organisations to provide beneficial support for pupils and their families. This help is welcomed by the vast majority of parents.

Most parents find staff welcoming and are happy that any problems they raise will be dealt with effectively. However, there is a minority of parents who do not feel their concerns are taken seriously. A selection of helpful information is available for parents on the school's website, including advice about parenting, staying safe online and a frequently asked questions section. The majority of parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, are confident that their children are safe at school.

Pupils are unanimously happy to talk to staff when they have concerns. They are certain that their issues will be resolved. Incidents of bullying and racism are rare but, when they do occur, leaders take prompt and effective action. Staff teach pupils how to stay safe. Pupils speak confidently about staying safe on the internet and know not to share their personal details online. They also know to tell an adult if they see anything of concern on the computer. Pupils know the 'green cross code' and have been tested on road safety to check their understanding. Pupils feel cared for and safe in school.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we agreed to focus on: the progress of pupils in mathematics; how leaders are enabling disadvantaged pupils to achieve their full potential; and the success of leaders' actions to improve pupils' attendance.
- Leaders provide a broad mathematics curriculum with opportunities for problem-solving and reasoning. Pupils are focused on learning, and lessons are adapted well to meet most pupils' needs. Pupils enjoy their learning in mathematics and talk confidently about the activities. They take pride in their work and present their workings in an organised manner. Staff provide pupils with a range of resources to support their understanding. Pupils enjoy discussing their mathematics in groups and solving problems together. Teachers organise a range of exciting cross-curricular mathematical opportunities. For example, Years 5

and 6 pupils used mathematics to enlarge pictures of Henry VIII and his contemporaries, producing a range of watercolour paintings. Other pupils calculate time zones, learn about ratio when cooking for large numbers of people, and handle money when running the tuck shop at lunchtimes. Consequently, most pupils are making strong progress in mathematics. However, more needs to be done to ensure that teachers' expectations are consistently high and that pupils achieve their full potential in mathematics.

- There are small numbers of disadvantaged pupils in the school and their progress is tracked frequently by staff. Leaders use additional funding thoughtfully and monitor its impact on pupils' outcomes closely. Disadvantaged pupils are known as individuals. Leaders recognise the importance of identifying their strengths and building their confidence. As a result, disadvantaged pupils participate fully in the life of the school. One-to-one and small-group support is organised to help pupils catch up in their learning when necessary. Disadvantaged pupils are attentive and talk confidently about their learning, and most make strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Improving pupils' attendance has been identified as a priority for the school. Leaders use a wide range of strategies with pupils and their families to encourage good attendance. Staff telephone home routinely on the first day of an absence. Letters are sent to parents and meetings are arranged when a pupil's absence is more persistent. Pupils are given rewards for good attendance and receive a special mention in assemblies and newsletters. In addition, breakfast club and after-school care provide parents with more flexible drop-off and collection times. Pupils enjoy coming to school and say that learning is fun. Consequently, overall attendance is improving.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are challenged consistently to achieve their full potential in mathematics
- the governing body holds leaders to account even more rigorously
- partnership with parents is strengthened further to engage more parents in supporting their children's learning at home.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, 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 Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rosemary Addison
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and other leaders, two members of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust. I also met with a group of pupils from Years 1 to 6 and heard two Year 5 pupils read. You accompanied me on visits to all classrooms, where I observed learning, spoke to pupils and looked at their work. Together, we reviewed a range of pupils' work in books from across key stages 1 and 2. I observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms and as they moved around the school.

I took account of 26 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 22 free-text comments. I also considered 11 responses to the online staff questionnaire and five responses to the pupil survey. A range of documentation was scrutinised, including: the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan; information on the school's website; safety records; minutes of meetings; various policies; and information about pupils' progress.