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Mrs Georgina Delmonte
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Delmonte

Short inspection of Hilldene Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 March 2019 with Jo Jones, Ofsted Inspector, 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 December 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection.

You and your leadership team have worked hard to create a caring school environment where everyone is valued. The vast majority of parents and carers agree that the school looks after pupils well, with one parent saying that the school is 'fully supportive and caring'. Pupils reflect this ethos in their attitudes and behaviour and the way they work well together. For example, older pupils routinely support younger pupils with their reading, which pupils say helps them to improve. The school works well with parents, building strong links with regular opportunities to support their children's learning.

School leaders have a clear and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and what needs to improve. Your actions have ensured that greater challenge has resulted in improvements in progress and attainment in writing. You accurately prioritise the need to improve pupils' attendance, and to increase the proportion of pupils achieving greater depth in mathematics at key stage 1. New strategies have been introduced to help address these priorities, which are beginning to have an impact.

Pupils enjoy a wide range of activities in lessons and through the wider curriculum. Enrichment activities include sports such as basketball and musical activities such as instrumental lessons and singing. Pupils particularly enjoy performing to an audience and spoke about this with enthusiasm; one pupil commented, 'We really enjoy performing: it makes us feel special'. Pupils' strong personal development and positive attitudes contribute well to their progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders, including the governing body, have ensured that keeping children safe is at the forefront of the school's work. You have created a nurturing environment where pupils feel protected and cared for.

Staff training is up to date and all staff are regularly reminded about their duties with regard to safeguarding pupils. As a result, all staff know, understand and follow the current statutory guidance and are vigilant in safeguarding pupils' welfare. Regular meetings ensure that they have good knowledge of local issues. Clear processes are in place so that staff know how to report concerns promptly. Safeguarding records are detailed and of a high quality. Leaders swiftly and carefully follow up any issues, working well with outside agencies.

The school's single central record is maintained well and checked regularly by you and governors. Leaders complete all the required checks to ensure that staff and volunteers are suitable to work in the school.

Pupils say they feel safe in school and the overwhelming majority of parents who answered Ofsted's online questionnaire agreed. Pupils are taught how to make sensible choices to help keep themselves safe outside school in a variety of situations. They say they understand about different forms of bullying, including online bullying, and that incidents are rare. However, if bullying does happen they know who to talk to and are confident that an adult will deal with it quickly. Leaders have developed a strong safeguarding culture in the school which is supported well by effective systems and practices.

Inspection findings

- The first key line of enquiry focused on leaders' work to support teachers in improving pupils' progress in mathematics at key stage 1 so that a higher proportion attain the higher standard. This was because in 2018 attainment at the higher standard dipped below national averages. I focused on pupils in key stage 1, particularly progress made by disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders have introduced new strategies to secure improvements, which are now being implemented in lessons. Teachers are planning more carefully to build on pupils' prior knowledge and strengthen their fluency in calculation. This in turn is supporting pupils well in improving the accuracy of their work. Strategies to deepen pupils' learning through problem-solving activities are also being implemented. The work given to pupils was mostly appropriately challenging, including for higher attainers.
- Work in pupils' books, including those of disadvantaged pupils, shows that they are making stronger progress over time. Improved understanding is shown in some pupils' ability to identify their own mistakes and self-correct their calculations. Some pupils know a variety of calculation strategies and are able to challenge themselves to find the most efficient way to solve a problem. However,

pupils do not yet have regular and sustained opportunities to deepen their thinking and give reasons for their choices.

- My second key line of enquiry was to explore the effectiveness of leaders' work to improve pupils' progress in reading at key stages 1 and 2. This is because the assessments at the end of key stage 2 in 2018 showed that progress and attainment of boys dipped in comparison to other boys nationally and were below average.
- Leaders were quick to implement new and improved strategies to secure more rapid progress. These begin with more secure teaching of phonics. Teachers ensure that pupils listen attentively to their explanations and accurate modelling of how to read letters and sound them out. Additional adults are used effectively to support pupils through carefully chosen questions and explanations. The school has purchased new books to inspire pupils, particularly boys, to read. They say that they enjoy reading more now because of this.
- We heard pupils reading with confidence and expression. Their reading was mostly accurate and if they came across an unfamiliar word, they used the strategies they had learned to work it out. Pupils also used their skills well to predict what might happen next in the story and were able to explain their reasoning. Pupils in key stage 2 are developing a love for literature and have opinions about their favourite author which they are able to justify. Recent assessment information suggests that boys currently at the school make stronger progress than in the past and are catching up with the girls.
- Finally, we focused on the impact of leaders' actions to improve pupils' attendance and reduce persistent absence. We looked at the attendance of boys, pupils eligible for free school meals and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This was because in 2018 rates of absence and persistent absence for these groups of pupils was higher than average.
- You and your staff have worked hard so that the whole school community understands the importance of good attendance. You have used a range of strategies to make improvements, including rewards such as 'amazing attendance' celebrations. You monitor attendance closely, identifying patterns of absenteeism. You have worked closely with families to understand the reasons for pupils' absences and have liaised with external agencies to support the work of the school. As a result, attendance has improved and rates of persistent absence for these groups have fallen. However, attendance remains too low, particularly for pupils eligible for free school meals.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress in mathematics at key stage 1 is further improved by ensuring that pupils are given more opportunities to think more deeply and explain their answers
- pupils' attendance continues to improve, particularly that of pupils eligible for free school meals.

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

Yours sincerely

David Lloyd
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection we met with you and members of the leadership team, and three members of the governing body, including the chair. We visited lessons with senior leaders and reviewed work in pupils' books in key stage 1, including those of disadvantaged pupils. We listened to pupils read in key stages 1 and 2. We observed pupils' behaviour around the school and at playtime. We talked to pupils about their learning and talked to them informally in the playground. We evaluated a range of documents including the school improvement plan, the school's self-evaluation documents and safeguarding records. I considered 292 responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents, 57 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey and 42 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.