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Mr Paul Disley
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Dear Mr Disley

Short inspection of Highwoods Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 March 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.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Parents, carers and pupils appreciate the friendly, 'community' feel of the school. One parent said, 'Everyone works so hard and goes the extra mile for the children.' Pupils I spoke to also said that they were happy at school. Leaders have the support of staff, governors and the wider school community. Parents are extremely positive about every aspect of the school and the overwhelming majority would recommend the school to others.

Leaders have made good progress in addressing areas of improvement from the previous inspection. Standards in writing in key stage 1 have improved and pupils are now provided with more opportunities to write for different purposes. The most able children throughout the school are being challenged more in lessons. Staff were pleased with the most recent outcomes for children in Reception, and for pupils at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2 in the 2018 national tests. Presentation of work and handwriting across the school has also improved. Pupils were proud of their work and many chose a piece of writing to show me as their 'best' piece of work this year.

The governing body is relatively new, including a new chair and a number of other recently recruited governors. Governors take their roles seriously and are committed to the school. They are beginning to develop their strategic role. They have undertaken some training and are looking at the skills they need on the governing body to ensure that they have a breadth of knowledge and skills to carry out their

responsibilities effectively. They are increasingly involved in checking the work of the school and creating plans for future improvements. Governors share your enthusiasm for the school and desire to raise standards further.

The good relationships and mutual respect established between teachers and pupils result in a calm and purposeful atmosphere in classes and around the school. Pupils are very supportive of their teachers. One pupil informed me, 'Teachers are always there to help you, especially when you are stuck, and I enjoy lessons.' Pupils are also supportive of each other. Pupils are very appreciative of the new libraries and books available to them, but the older children also said they would like more play equipment in the outdoor area at lunchtime. Pupils enjoy the range of trips linked to the curricular themes and the extra-curricular clubs.

Accurate self-evaluation identifies the school's strengths and points out where improvements are needed. For example, pupils' combined attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at a higher standard at the end of key stage 2 is not as strong as it is nationally, and this is a current priority. As a result of leaders' analysis of the school's internal data you have also included raising pupils' attainment in mathematics as a further priority in the school's improvement plan.

The school's improvement plan details the next steps and the targets that leaders are working towards and these contribute to the school's capacity for further improvement. The leadership team is focused and determined to continuously improve the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that policies are up to date and meet the latest guidance. All staff are provided with safeguarding training and this is updated annually. All of the appropriate pre-employment checks are carried out on staff and volunteers. Staff know their pupils well. Any concerns are reported and considered carefully and prompt action is taken.

Pupils spoke confidently about the ways in which school leaders and staff work hard to keep them safe and look after them. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and staff agree. They know who to go to if they have a concern and feel supported by the ways in which issues are resolved.

Pupils know how to keep safe on the internet and the reasons for doing so. They understand what bullying is and explained that, while it may happen, albeit rarely, it is resolved quickly and effectively by staff.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain whether the school remained good, my first key line of enquiry was about how leaders were ensuring sustained improvements in pupils' achievement in reading and writing at key stages 1 and 2. Since 2015, results of the Year 1 phonics screening check have been well above the national average and I was

interested to find out how teaching develops pupils using knowledge of letters and sounds to read words and in comprehension in reading, and how it fosters in pupils a love of reading. In 2018, pupils' progress and attainment in reading and writing at both key stages, including those of the most able pupils, were at least in line with national averages.

- Leaders have reviewed the impact of the school's work to improve reading and writing and redesigned the English curriculum as a result. The use of the school's phonics scheme has been amended to meet pupils' needs and whole-class reading led by an adult has been introduced in key stage 2.
- I observed phonics teaching during the inspection and this was characterised by high expectations, good subject knowledge among teachers and learning support assistants, careful planning and with lots of practice and repetition of essential sounds. Writing tasks are now linked closely to the reading pupils do in class. Evidence in pupils' writing books across the school shows that they make good progress in their writing skills. One parent commented, 'A love of reading and excitement about books is key'.
- Teachers have ensured that pupils have a good understanding of grammar, punctuation and spelling. As a result, by the end of Year 6 in 2018 the majority of pupils were able to use punctuation and grammar correctly and attain well-above the national average in the English grammar, punctuation and spelling test at the expected and higher standard. Pupils use this knowledge well in their writing.
- I also sought to establish the breadth and richness of the curriculum and how leaders ensure that all pupils develop appropriate knowledge and skills to make good progress through the wider curriculum. Leaders have given careful consideration to the content and organisation of the curriculum. Themes have recently been revised to enable pupils to be immersed in the themed subjects being studied to deepen their understanding, while other subjects continue to be taught discretely.
- Pupils enjoy a wide variety of enrichment days and trips. The pupils I spoke to were very appreciative of the curriculum; however, some pupils identified that they had experienced less teaching in computing recently as a result of failing equipment. The environment is vibrant and displays in the school celebrate the work of pupils and the experiences they have to broaden their understanding of the curriculum.
- Leaders provide teachers with strong guidance with regard to curriculum development. However, there are limited opportunities for all subject leaders to check the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects and evaluate standards achieved to ensure that pupils make at least good progress. This has been identified as an area for development in the school's improvement plans.
- Other lines of enquiry centred on attendance and behaviour in school. Attendance is well above the national average. The school's processes for monitoring attendance are strong and staff use a range of appropriate strategies to reward, encourage and support attendance, and to challenge absence.
- The school is fully inclusive and pupils who find it hard to make the correct

behaviour choices are increasingly able to do so independently or with support, due to the careful and well-judged provision they receive. You address the emotional and social well-being of pupils where necessary. For example, you have provided play therapy, nurture groups, additional support and intervention in school as appropriate.

- I also looked at how the funding was used from the physical education and sports premium and the pupil premium. The most recent plans and evaluation of impact of the spending were not available to me on the school website prior to my visit. You were able to provide me with some of the required information and the relevant spending plans are now on the website. My meeting with governors confirmed that they know how the funding is spent and understand their legal responsibilities, but have not yet evaluated the impact of the funding.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the strategic role and effectiveness of the new governing body is further strengthened, so that it has the skills and expertise to provide appropriate challenge to school leaders and ensure the school's continuing improvement
- the curriculum is strengthened further by developing the role of middle leaders to enable them to take a more strategic role in the leadership of the school to sustain and improve standards across all subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Ashley Best-White
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held meetings with you and other senior leaders and a group of five governors. I spoke to groups of pupils and individual pupils around the school. We made visits to lessons to observe pupils' learning and took a learning walk around the school. I looked at pupils' books across a range of ages, abilities and subjects, as well as information from the school's assessment system. I scrutinised a range of documentary evidence, which included the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, current progress information and pupils' attendance information. Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, along with the school's record of checks carried out on staff working at the school. I evaluated safeguarding referrals and child protection records, including the single central record. I also looked at the school's website. In addition, I took account of the 83

responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, the views expressed in a letter received during the inspection, 47 free-text responses and the 24 responses to the staff questionnaire.