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Mrs White
Headteacher
Squirrels Heath Infant School
Salisbury Road
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Dear Mrs White

Short inspection of Squirrels Heath Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 22 March 2016 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 July 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment in April 2014, you have built a team of highly motivated staff who share your aspirations and drive to make sure children learn well and thrive. The leadership team has successfully tackled the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. You have created a 'can do' culture without compromising on your high expectations. With the full support of governors, you have made sure that the profile of teaching has been strengthened. You have tackled staffing issues, which has meant delivering difficult messages when the quality of teaching has fallen short of good. Your high expectations mean that you will only recruit the best staff for Squirrels Heath. Seven new teachers joined the school this academic year. This has also secured stability in staffing, the lack of which had a significant impact on Year 2 pupils' progress in 2015. There is now a much stronger teaching profile throughout the school. Work in books and your own achievement information confirms that most pupils are now making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

All staff work collaboratively in order to benefit pupils. Your cycle of monitoring provides an excellent overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Staff have embraced the challenge of assessing pupils' progress without levels. The system you adopted last year has evolved to secure greater accuracy in your assessment of pupils' achievement. Teachers demonstrated how they plot individual pupils' attainment on a Venn diagram. This visual approach instantly identifies pupils working at the expected level, those working above it and those pupils who may be

underachieving. However, the-most able pupils are not set aspirational targets to secure rapid progress. Their achievement as a group is not recorded, which means you are not able to demonstrate that they are making as much progress as other key groups.

Senior leaders explained that monitoring activities are used not only to gather key information on the quality of teaching, but also to coach staff. Apart from observations of the quality of teaching in lessons, most activities are undertaken jointly, including scrutiny of planning, sampling of pupils' work in books and analysis of pupils' progress information. These activities are then followed up with professional discussions. This collegiate approach encourages self-reflection, giving teachers the confidence to take control of their own professional development. As a consequence, staff morale is exceptionally high as indicated in the meetings I conducted with leaders, teachers and support staff and the positive responses to the staff survey. You have restructured support staff's terms of employment so that they can be better deployed to meet the needs of the school. They are now part of the appraisal system. However, their targets for improvement do not allow you to monitor the impact of their work precisely, particularly their support for pupils who have special educational needs or disability.

You have also secured further improvements, including stronger leadership and better provision in the early years, resulting in more children achieving a good level of development than the national average in 2015. In our joint observations, I was impressed by the extent to which children were completely absorbed in their learning. Both inside and outside, children were fully engaged in a wide variety of activities, which developed skills, knowledge and understanding in all areas of learning. Middle leaders use their analysis of children's achievements to plug any gaps in their teaching and in children's learning. Children are taught to write accurately and with confidence. The learning ambassadors, in Reception, were very clear that it is essential to start a sentence with a capital letter and to end with a full stop. Indeed, one ambassador exclaimed that if you didn't use finger spaces, the writing would be 'gobbledegook'.

Work in books confirms that teachers provide effective guidance and pointers for pupils' next steps in their learning. Similarly, a weakness in calculation has been resolved through the daily teaching of mental mathematics which is speeding up the pupils' fluency. Nonetheless, as you are aware, there are too few opportunities for all pupils to apply their basic mathematics skills in problem solving situations.

The school's focus on developing thoughtful, mature and responsible learners is evident throughout the school. Pupils told me that they enjoy having additional responsibilities, such as play leaders, where they help to look after the younger Reception children. They understand the consequences of their behaviour, and explained to me the traffic light system. They said that 'being on red was really bad', but getting a gold award was 'the best' because they can phone their parents to tell them about their achievement and have a tea party with the headteacher.

Safeguarding is effective.

Your leadership puts the care and welfare of the pupils at the heart of the school's work. Procedures are rigorous, detailed and of high quality. Both you as safeguarding lead, and the deputy safeguarding lead, are tenacious in making sure that every pupil is protected from potential dangers. You work closely with external agencies to secure the right support through timely referrals. You follow these referrals up with determination if there is a lack of response. Pupils are taught about all possible risks and dangers, including online safety. Role play and visits are used to highlight key messages, which pupils take on board. Following a visit from the police, pupils wrote, 'I never talk to strangers' and 'I will always stay with my mummy when I go out.' Staff have been well trained and they are absolutely clear of the procedures they must follow if they have any concerns about a pupil. They understand their duties with regard to radicalisation and extremism, female genital mutilation and child sexual exploitation.

Inspection findings

- You and other leaders ensure that the school continues to move forward. Everyone is 'on board' to secure continuous improvement. You do not hesitate to seek support and guidance from a range of external sources to moderate your assessments, develop leadership capacity and provide professional development for staff.
- Training includes a recent programme to develop the role of middle leaders. Already, they are leading training to support their colleagues. They have a good oversight of the school's performance because they are effectively monitoring the quality of teaching and learning for their area of responsibility. They keep a close watch on those pupils identified as underachieving from progress checks and meetings. Achievement meetings with teachers are held regularly to make sure that their work is having enough impact to secure accelerated progress for most groups of learners.
- Attainment in reading was stronger than in writing and mathematics in 2015, because more pupils achieved the higher levels in this subject. Most-able pupils are not set challenging targets to make sure that the proportion of pupils exceeding the expected level in writing and mathematics is at least comparable to that in reading. You do not record the achievement of this group of pupils separately. As a result, although work in books confirms that the most able are making good progress, you are not able to confidently judge whether they are making the progress they are capable of. Moreover, there are not enough activities for pupils to apply their basic mathematics skills in problem solving situations to deepen their understanding.
- In 2015, fewer pupils achieved the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics (the sounds that letters make) screening check than the national average. The deputy headteacher, who is also the reading manager, monitors closely

the impact of the new phonics scheme. Our joint observations confirm that pupils are taught rigorously as activities are pitched at the precise level to build on what pupils already know and can do. Early predictions suggest that this year the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard will be at least in line with the national figure.

- Your robust monitoring shows that the gap between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and their peers is closing. Under the guidance of the teacher with responsibility for the use of pupil premium, these pupils receive intensive support in the afternoons, and read daily with volunteers. Likewise, the gap has closed between boys and girls in writing in Year 1 and is closing in Year 2. The carefully planned curriculum provides exciting and relevant topics for all pupils. The most recent pirate topic has secured highly motivated writers, including the boys.
- In 2015, pupils with special educational needs or disability made less progress than other groups of learners. Their starting points were low, particularly in speech and language. The assistant headteacher, who is also the special educational needs leader checks the impact of intervention strategies and ensures that only the successful ones are used to support and boost pupils' achievement. The assistant headteacher has fine-tuned some of the interventions to secure maximum impact. For example, some pupils are now taught intensively on a one-to-one basis to develop and extend their phonics knowledge and whole word recognition. This is beginning to increase pupils' ability to recall these basic facts and begin to apply them in lessons. Nonetheless, the adults who lead these interventions are not held fully to account for the progress pupils make.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- challenging targets are set for the most-able pupils so that the proportion of pupils who exceed age-related expectations in writing and mathematics is at least in line with that in reading
- the most-able pupils' achievement is tracked as a group to make sure that they make as much progress as all other groups
- pupils undertake more problem-solving activities so that they are able to deepen their understanding in mathematics, particularly the most able
- leaders monitor the impact of teaching assistants' work more closely so that the pupils they support make good or better progress, particularly those who have special educational needs or disability.

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

Yours sincerely

Mary Hinds
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspector observed teaching and learning in key stage 1 classes and in the Reception classes. These observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders, including the headteacher. Meetings were held with leaders; four members of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair; and a representative of the local authority. The inspector spoke to pupils informally at breaktime. A number of documents were scrutinised including the school's own evaluation of performance, those relating to arrangements for safeguarding, the school's plans for development and information about pupils' progress.