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19 May 2016

Mrs Lucy Leighton
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Leighton

Short inspection of Hillshott Infant School and Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 26 April 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 Hillshott Infant School and Nursery was judged to be good in November 2010.

This school continues to be good.

You have rapidly instilled a sense of purpose and teamwork among all of the staff to rectify some weaknesses in the provision for children in the early years foundation stage, and push forward standards in literacy. As a result, the progress of children in both the Nursery and Reception classes is accelerating. Furthermore, gaps in achievement for disadvantaged pupils in key stage 1 are narrowing in reading and writing. This improvement is yet to be seen in mathematics for these pupils. However, parents, staff and governors are full of praise about the impact of your effective leadership since your appointment in September 2015.

A positive and inclusive culture is fully evident around the school and in all classrooms where the contributions of all pupils are valued. Parents of pupils in the speech and language unit are particularly impressed with the progress that their children are making. One parent said, 'I saw a massive improvement in my child's progress after just one week at this school!'

You set high expectations of pupils through a set of agreed values. As a result, the behaviour of pupils is outstanding throughout all areas of the school. For instance, children in the Nursery and Reception play cooperatively with others and share equipment and small tools when making three-dimensional sculptures, and older pupils in Year 2 work industriously together writing a shared story. Pupils in key stage 1 express much enthusiasm and a sense of pride about their school. They are very keen to talk about the many interesting things they have learned at school this year.

You have ensured that the promotion of the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively engenders greater understanding for pupils in the world in which they live. Assemblies are used effectively to promote the core British values of tolerance and respect for others. Well planned half-termly curriculum themes develop specific skills in subjects such as geography, history and art. The displays of pupils' high-quality art work around the school suggest that art is a growing strength across the school.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school because staff always care for them. Incidents of poor behaviour and bullying are extremely rare and when they happen are dealt with quickly. Staff provide all pupils with the necessary age-relevant knowledge about how to keep safe when using the internet and who they should go to if they need help.

You have worked in close partnership with governors and school leaders to quickly highlight key priorities for improvement. These are included in an effective plan of action with measurable targets. This is an improvement on the findings of the previous inspection. Clearly identified roles and responsibilities ensure that staff performance can be measured effectively.

Safeguarding is effective.

All safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements. School leaders and governors ensure that effective procedures for the safety and well-being of all pupils are applied with rigour. Training for all staff and governors in safeguarding is regular. This ensures that staff are fully conversant with the latest government guidance, including the 'Prevent' duty to counter radicalisation.

Senior leaders with specific responsibility for child protection work very closely with staff from other agencies when any safeguarding concerns arise. Records related to child protection are of a high quality. The progress of the most vulnerable pupils is monitored very closely to ensure that their needs are fully met.

Inspection findings

You quickly identified weaknesses in the achievement of children in the early years foundation stage. Previous weaknesses relating to assessment in this part of the school have quickly been rectified. As a result of determined leadership, a comprehensive and effective system to record the progress of each child in the Nursery and Reception classes is used consistently well by all staff. The information recorded against each area of learning for each child is used very effectively to ensure planned learning activities fully meet the needs of these children. Progress of all children is now accelerating rapidly in all areas of learning. The scrutiny of current assessment information confirms that the proportion of children on track to achieve a good level of development by the end of Reception this year is in line with that seen both locally and nationally. This is a significant improvement in comparison to the previous academic year.

These improvements in assessment and planning are reflected in high-quality provision for all children in the early years foundation stage. Staff plan an extensive range of imaginative learning experiences for these children both inside classrooms and in the stimulating outdoor areas. Imaginative use of resources outside encourages children to learn through play, such as making a 'pie' in the mud kitchen for a monster and painting a mural on the wall behind the chicken coop. Adults engage well with the children during these activities to stimulate and extend the children's learning further.

Attainment in reading is broadly in line with that expected nationally by the end of key stage 1. The effective teaching of phonics in Year 1 provides pupils with the necessary skills to read at age-related levels by the end of Year 2. Over a third of these pupils are reading at above age-related expectations nationally by the time they move on to junior school.

The progress of pupils in receipt of the pupil premium (the additional government funding for those eligible for free school meals) is best in writing where assessment information confirms that these pupils are making accelerated progress and gaps in achievement are narrowing rapidly in comparison to similar pupils nationally. However, this is not the case in mathematics where their progress is slower when compared to these pupils.

Those pupils with special educational needs or disability make good and often better progress because of effective support provided for them. Pupils in the speech and language unit make good progress in both their literacy and numeracy skills. This is due to high-quality individual or small-group support from well-trained staff. This high-quality support continues for these pupils during the afternoon sessions when they are included in lessons with other pupils in their respective year groups.

A broad and balanced curriculum is effectively planned for pupils in key stage 1. Literacy skills are developed well and pupils make good progress in their writing. Pupils in Year 2 are careful with their handwriting. Spelling and punctuation are accurate and pupils respond well to the teachers' marking and suggestions for improvement. As a result, pupils' outcomes in writing are rapidly improving. A good range of clubs and sporting activities provide many opportunities for pupils to develop positive attitudes about healthy lifestyles. Opportunities are planned for pupils to develop their numeracy skills in activities such as cooking.

The headteacher and those with middle leadership responsibilities regularly monitor the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Findings are shared among the staff team and used to identify areas for further improvement and staff training. For example, school leaders have identified training for staff in the teaching of mathematics to ensure that pupils' outcomes in this subject mirror those in literacy.

Governors take their strategic role seriously. They work in close partnership with the headteacher and other school leaders to initiate further school improvement for the benefit of the whole school community. They make good use of performance

information to ask challenging questions of school leaders about the progress different groups of pupils make.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- gaps in achievement for different groups of pupils are eliminated and especially so in mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Philip Mann
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspector scrutinised a wide range of documentation and jointly observed teaching and learning in all classes with the headteacher. Further meetings were held with the headteacher, teachers with a middle leadership responsibility, the chair of the governing body and one other governor, and a representative from the local authority. The school's safeguarding arrangements were examined closely. Discussions were also held with a group of pupils from Year 1 and Year 2 about their work. The inspector met with some parents at the school gate. The inspector reviewed 78 responses on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 14 free text messages. There were 21 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.