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Mr Anthony Hilldrup
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hilldrup

Short inspection of Halton Lodge Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 September 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 November 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 taking up your appointment as headteacher in January 2014, you have taken bold and very important decisions. These have led to the school continuing to provide a good quality of education and, additionally, increasing the capacity of all staff to improve the school even further.

The governing body now has the combined skills to analyse accurately the effectiveness of all aspects of the school. It can give good advice and support. Most significantly, governors can challenge you and other key leaders to ensure that educational provision continues to improve.

You have raised, and continue to raise, expectations of what Halton Lodge pupils can achieve. Your vision for the school is aspirational. Staff are clear what that vision is and support you. The recent restructuring of the school's leadership and teaching teams have invigorated staff. They are beginning to understand their roles and are excited about the responsibilities that have been delegated to them. However, a wide understanding of accountability and how to evaluate improvement for these responsibilities is only just developing.

Since the last inspection, results at the end of Year 6 have been variable, but always at least good. Results in mathematics have been consistently strong for many years. You are rightly reviewing how pupils are taught to read and write. Pupils who left last year did not achieve as well in writing as they did in other

subjects. You and your staff have already started an extended programme of training which aims to improve the teaching of writing.

It is evident that pupils at Halton Lodge are happy and enjoy their learning. Teachers are able to ensure that pupils learn well and quickly through an interesting range of activities. Teachers plan well for the needs of pupils of different abilities and for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teaching assistants play an important role in the learning of all. They readily accept responsibility and are well trained. An area for improvement from the last inspection highlighted the need to improve teaching, and indeed it has improved. All pupils are encouraged and expected to do their best, including the most able.

Pupils behave very well in classes because they enjoy their learning. They are attentive and enthusiastic. In the playground some can be boisterous. Recently introduced activities and resources are leading to improved behaviour at breaktimes. Midday supervisors are beginning to take more responsibility for ensuring that all children have positive attitudes to play and none are excluded from having fun.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and records are detailed and of good quality. Procedures to ensure that only suitable staff are recruited are secure.

Staff new to the school undergo a comprehensive induction programme. This includes good guidance on how to recognise children who are potentially at risk and clear instruction on how to respond to concerns. All staff receive regular and good-quality updates to their training. The school has effective partnerships with other agencies that have responsibility for child protection and safeguarding.

Pupils are taught well about how to be safe in different circumstances. Pupils are entirely confident that they would talk to an adult if they were unsure about a situation that might threaten themselves or their peers.

Inspection findings

- There is a happy and highly positive atmosphere around the school. Pupils in all classes are attentive, work enthusiastically and really enjoy their learning. Pupils work on activities that are very well planned and closely match their needs. Pupils are very responsible from an early age and will work hard, even when not directly supervised by an adult.
- Teachers and teaching assistants know pupils very well. They know how to support them, and just how far to challenge them. As a consequence, all groups of pupils make good progress. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported particularly well. They make good progress from their starting points.

- Learning in classrooms is very well supplemented by a broad range of additional activities. These promote creativity in children, inspire them and give them opportunities to enhance their artistic, scientific and other cultural learning.
- There is a whole-school systematic programme in place to teach phonics, where pupils learn how to blend sounds to read words. Although this programme is effective, you have reviewed it and are replacing your current phonics scheme with one that you believe will accelerate children's reading even more rapidly. The teaching of writing is under review too, and plans are firmly in place to train staff and introduce improvements this term.
- Mathematics has been of consistently high quality over a number of years. Consequently, pupils achieve well in mathematics. Once again, you are not complacent. You are responding to changes in the mathematics curriculum by adapting the way the subject is taught. You are ensuring that pupils are more confident by securely mastering skills and developing deeper mathematical understanding.
- Your scrutiny is not limited to core subjects. You have successfully extended the range of subjects taught well. Pupils enjoy spending time learning about science, languages, humanities and the arts.
- Pupils' personal development is carefully nurtured throughout the school. All pupils are expected to take personal responsibility for their actions. As pupils get older, they are expected to show maturity and take greater responsibility, encouraging all to behave and participate. Many older pupils rise to specific leadership responsibilities, being good role models to others.
- Both parents and pupils say that behaviour in classes is very good. This is because teaching is strong, expectations are high and pupils really enjoy their learning. Older pupils say that they have noticed a difference in that 'teachers are now stricter'. They say this is a good thing because they learn more and enjoy their work. Pupils' attendance is good.
- Pupils describe bullying in terms of name-calling. They say that when it is reported, staff are very good at sorting it out. Pupils said that there was too much play-fighting which developed into real fighting. They also say that this year, this example of poor behaviour is much reduced. They believe the improvement is due to there being much more to do at breaktimes and because midday supervisors are better at stopping inappropriate behaviour before it gets out of hand.
- Children start your school with widely varying levels of development. The most able children can already write simple sentences and use three-digit numbers. However, typically, children start your school with knowledge and skills below those that are expected for their age. They improve well in Reception, but are still behind when they enter key stage 1.
- Outcomes from last year's Year 1 phonics check showed a marked improvement over previous years, but were still behind the national average. This confirms that pupils are making good progress, but from low starting points. Improvement continues throughout year groups and your pupils catch up with others in reading

and overtake others in mathematics. Pupils' achievement in writing has been variable over recent years. Last year, a smaller proportion of Halton Lodge pupils attained the expected standard in writing than pupils nationally.

- Over recent years, there has been consistency in the achievement of different groups. You, and now all class teachers, are very focused on the achievement of pupils who are disadvantaged. You target the additional funding that the school receives for these pupils very well. Last year disadvantaged pupils made better progress in reading and mathematics than pupils nationally. However, the progress they made in writing was not as strong. The most able disadvantaged pupils made outstanding progress in reading. Their progress in other subjects was broadly similar to that of all pupils nationally.
- The group that made the best progress was low-ability pupils. This reflects the highly successful teaching and additional support that they received. Their rapid rates of progress were commendable. Last year, leavers were very well prepared for secondary school.
- When you joined this school it was providing a good education. However, you were not complacent and you made a thorough review of how well it was performing. You also considered how well it was structured to promote further improvement. You have high expectations for the pupils in the school and you aspire to improve their education even further. You made fundamental and wide-ranging changes to the way that all aspects of the school were led. You have managed this considerable change with skill. The governing body has given you very good support. The current staff support your vision to provide an even higher quality of education; continuing to raise standards.
- The reorganisation of leadership structures within your school has resulted in most leaders being either new to post or experiencing significant change in their role. They feel very well supported by you in helping them adapt to these new roles. However, there is still work to be done in ensuring that all leaders fully understand the accountability that goes with these responsibilities and how best they should monitor improvement.
- The school website is currently being reviewed and updated. At the time of my visit there were a few minor omissions in governor information and the spending of additional funds on promoting physical education and on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvements continue to be made to the teaching of writing so that most pupils leave the school enjoying writing and being able to write confidently and with clarity
- systems to monitor the effectiveness of all aspects of school improvement:
 - identify staff who are responsible for driving each aspect of school improvement

- identify staff who are responsible for monitoring the progress of each aspect of school improvement
- provide clear and measurable targets to be met at key points throughout an aspect of improvement, enabling early identification of any slow improvement

■ the school's website complies with requirements for maintained schools.

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

Yours sincerely

Neil Mackenzie

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and another senior leader, groups of pupils and four members of the governing body. I met with a group of teachers and teaching assistants. Documents were scrutinised, including attendance records, safeguarding checks, logs of pupil behaviour and records of checks on the quality of teaching. I also visited classrooms with you to speak to pupils, look at their books and observe their learning. I took account of the 10 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and nine parental comments. I also took account of a survey completed by 15 members of staff, your recent parental survey and a survey completed by 32 of your pupils. I met with a representative of the local authority.