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Mr Joseph McIntyre
Headteacher
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Dear Mr McIntyre

Short inspection of Holwell Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 November 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.

Since your appointment in September 2014, you have worked closely with other senior leaders and the governors to improve the school after a period of decline following the previous inspection. The decline had left a legacy of underachievement. Your passion and commitment to ensure that all pupils succeed is noted by many of the parents who responded to the online questionnaire. Typical comments include the following: 'Both my children are at this school and they are doing very well. The provisions they have in place for children to access the curriculum are brilliant.'

With your clear direction, the leadership team has re-established the good quality of education noted at the time of the previous inspection. Many parents say that the partnership between home and school is improving. However, a small proportion would like more information about recent changes, for instance about the newly implemented behaviour policy.

You have monitored teaching and learning very effectively to eliminate previous weaknesses. Your findings have ensured that teachers plan tasks that are carefully matched to the different abilities of pupils. This is an improvement on the findings of the previous inspection and is resulting in rapidly increasing rates of progress.

Your self-evaluation of the school is thorough and accurate. This work is used well to inform the school's plan for improvement. Priorities are carefully chosen and agreed with staff and governors. The timescales for improvement are realistic but the targets set within the plan are not easily measurable against pupils' outcomes. This limits the ability of governors to assess success and measure performance.

Governors have a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses due to their effective monitoring. They have a good understanding about how to use pupils' progress information to hold school leaders to account. They regularly seek the views of parents. They recognise that still more can be done to strengthen the school's partnership with its parent community.

Your good leadership continues to develop a positive climate for learning. Pupils say they like being at school. The behaviour records indicate that there is very little bullying in school. Discussions with pupils confirm this to be so. Sometimes a small proportion of boys in Years 5 and 6 find it difficult to conform to class rules. With the support of all staff, you have introduced a new behaviour management policy to raise expectations, provide the necessary care and support for the pupils and reduce the incidence of any unacceptable behaviour in class or in the playground. Pupils in Year 6 say that this initiative is proving successful and that pupils' behaviour is improving. Your records show that inappropriate behaviour is not a significant issue in other year groups. Pupils' attendance continues to improve.

Safeguarding is effective.

Together with governors, you ensure that arrangements for the well-being and safety of pupils fully meet statutory requirements. Records related to the recruitment and vetting of staff are comprehensive and fully comply with regulations. Any cause for concern about pupils is followed up immediately and appropriate action taken if required. Training in the latest safeguarding requirements and on e-safety is regular for all staff and governors. This includes training in the government's 'Prevent' duty to counter risks associated with radicalisation. You have established a culture where safeguarding is clearly the responsibility of all staff. Staff supervising pupils at playtimes know what to do if pupils raise a concern with them.

You work in close partnership with the local authority and other external agencies to ensure the safety of pupils. The progress and well-being of the most vulnerable pupils are monitored closely to ensure that their needs are fully met. Detailed records are kept of any cause for concern and these are fully monitored by the governors with a specific responsibility for safeguarding.

Inspection findings

- A rising trend of improvement is evident for children in the Reception classes in early literacy skills and mathematical development. Children are

quickly learning the sounds that letters make in phonics sessions to help them read. This good progress in phonics is carried through into key stage 1, where an above-average number of pupils in 2016 achieved the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check. Pupils of lower ability in Year 2 are able to use their growing phonic knowledge effectively to sound out simple unfamiliar words in their reading books.

- Gaps in achievement are diminishing quickly for disadvantaged pupils. Scrutiny of their books and analysis of the latest assessment information confirms that disadvantaged pupils are making good progress overall in literacy and mathematics.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language make good and often rapid progress.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because support is carefully planned to meet their needs in class or in specific support sessions.
- The effective matching of tasks by teachers to the ability of the most able pupils provides them with good levels of challenge in English and mathematics. Talking to the most able pupils in Year 6 confirmed that they are pleased with what they have learned this term. They read with fluency and expression from a range of fiction books written by several children's authors. In mathematics, they are able to accurately translate a shape onto a different quadrant using coordinates.
- All pupils are responding well to good-quality feedback from their teachers.
- Scrutiny of writing by pupils from Year 4 to Year 6 confirms that the vast majority of pupils are making good progress. However, the writing of some older boys is often untidy and simple errors are repeated in spelling and punctuation. These weaknesses limit pupils' ability to write with speed and accuracy.
- Effective use is made of assessment information to monitor the progress of all pupils. The headteacher holds half-termly meetings with teachers about the progress pupils are making. These meetings are used well to identify specific strategies to ensure that any pupil falling behind is given the necessary support to succeed.
- Precise use of the pupil premium funding has reversed the past decline in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, which was due to some previously weak teaching. A review of the latest assessment information confirms that the vast majority of the pupils are now making good and often rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics compared to other pupils nationally.
- Pupils benefit from a well-planned curriculum that includes learning French and participation in themed weeks, for example those with a focus on e-safety, anti-bullying and languages. There are good opportunities for pupils to play a musical instrument or participate in physical education and competitive sport. Pupils take great pride in singing and this is a strength of the school that is held in high regard within the local area.
- The British values of democracy, tolerance and respect for others are promoted well. Furthermore, assemblies and trips to places of worship develop the pupils' understanding of their place within the wider world.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- handwriting is taught effectively throughout the school so that pupils write accurately and neatly in their books
- parents feel fully involved in the school's development
- targets in the school improvement plan are linked closely to pupils' outcomes so that they are straightforward to measure.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner 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

I looked at a wide range of school documentation including that on the school's website. I jointly observed the teaching of literacy and mathematics skills in the classes for Year 5 and 6 pupils with you. I met with you to discuss school improvement and the progress pupils are making. We discussed the safeguarding of all pupils and I undertook a review of the school's safeguarding arrangements.

I talked to some pupils in Year 6 about their work. I listened to a sample of pupils from Year 2 and Year 6 read.

A meeting was held with the leader for English and with the special educational needs coordinator. I met with the chair of the governing body and one other governor, and a representative from the local authority. I met with a number of parents at the start of the school day and reviewed 35 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 34 free text messages. There were no responses to Ofsted's online staff or pupil questionnaires.

I chose to review five key lines of enquiry during this inspection. These included the school's use of self-evaluation, the use of the additional funding that the school receives for disadvantaged pupils, the teaching and progress in English and mathematics, the promotion of British values, and safeguarding.

You were appointed to the school at the start of the 2014/15 academic year.