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Mr John Smith and Mrs Julie Reece  
Executive Principal and Principal  
Hollington Primary Academy  
Hollington Old Lane  
St Leonards-on-Sea  
East Sussex  
TN38 9DS

Dear Mr Smith and Mrs Reece

### **Short inspection of Hollington Primary Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 27 April 2017, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in January 2013.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You are both unrelenting in your belief that the school should be a haven of safety for your pupils and that every day matters in terms of learning. Your drive to improve attendance has been successful but you know there is more to do. You recognise that pupils can only learn well and 'think big' about their future aspirations by being in school every day. In an area of significant disadvantage, you are effective in leading a school that offers pupils the opportunity to broaden their horizons and understand more about the world in which they live.

You show great care for your pupils, their families and your staff. Parents told me that they feel listened to by staff and that their children enjoy coming to school. Teachers commented on how you look after their well-being and always think about their workload before making changes. As a result, teachers are happy to stay at the school and recruitment has not been an issue. This has certainly contributed towards the school's consistently effective teaching and impressive improvements in standards.

When we visited classrooms we observed well-behaved pupils who were engaged in and enjoying their learning. Pupils confirmed to me that this was typical. Within the school there are pupils who find it more difficult to manage their behaviour. However, your philosophy and approach lead to measureable improvements over time. Pupils certainly take pride in their school and their work. They were especially positive and proud about the coloured badges that recognise the improvements in

their handwriting and presentation.

The majority of children join the school with skills and knowledge that are much lower than those found typically. Many children are at the very early stages of speech and language development when they join in Nursery. Recognising the needs of the community and the benefit the school could have, you opened provision for two-year-olds in September 2015. This has the potential to make a great difference to outcomes for children in the longer term. However, we agreed that the current staffing arrangements do not provide enough leadership or expertise to develop the provision further.

You understand that reading is a key skill for your pupils and essential to unlock future learning. Reading is at the centre of the curriculum and standards in all key stages have risen sharply because of your focus on this. When pupils fall behind, there are effective strategies and programmes in place to help them catch up. Pupils enjoy reading and the interesting curriculum is based around well-chosen texts. You do, however, recognise that although this approach has raised standards, the strong focus on reading has restricted the development of pupils' skills in some other subject areas. You have plans to empower subject leaders to address this in the near future.

You have used the pupil premium funding effectively to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make good progress and catch up with other pupils nationally. Innovative use of the funds to provide your own early intervention support, such as in speech and language therapy, has been particularly effective. However, as leaders you never stand still. This year you have introduced a new more consistent approach to teaching mathematics that is already helping pupils to think more deeply. The new approach has been instrumental in improving teachers' subject knowledge. In key stage 2, pupils are already making stronger progress in mathematics, and the new system is becoming embedded in key stage 1, albeit more slowly.

Your governors are glad they chose to join the Hastings Academy Trust. They can see the benefits that the link with the University of Brighton has brought to the school, for example in the teaching of mathematics and phonics. Governors welcome the opportunities for you and your staff to work with other schools in the trust to develop your own expertise and interests. Over time, governors have challenged you and checked that your work with other schools has not been to the detriment of the pupils of Hollington. Governors have reviewed their organisation to focus on what is most important. Recent changes in the membership of the governing body have come at a time when the trust is reviewing its own governance structure to ensure it best meets the needs of all of its schools. You are enthusiastic about the contribution you make to the future direction of the trust, and welcome the effective support and challenge that the trust provides.

Your strong leadership has been recognised by the trust. You are now providing executive leadership for another school in the trust who can now also benefit from your unwavering belief that every child can achieve. The new shared leadership has continued to promote a culture of high expectations of behaviour and learning. The

vast majority of staff recognise this and live up to your high expectations and do the very best for, and value, the pupils and community that the school serves.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You have a good understanding of the community you serve and strive to make a positive difference. You have developed a strong safeguarding team, led ably and professionally by a vice-principal to ensure that pupils are kept safe from harm. The team has an extensive caseload of vulnerable pupils and works very well with their families and other agencies, including children's services and the police.

Your staff are vigilant for signs of danger and understand the processes and protocols they must follow as a result of their regular training. Recognising the importance of pupils being in school daily, you have strengthened your work around attendance. As a result, persistent absence is falling. Overall attendance is improving, but remains below average.

You are reflective and continuously look for ways to improve your systems and routines. For example, we discussed how supervision in the outdoor area in the early years could be further enhanced.

### **Inspection findings**

- During this inspection I focused on:
  - the capacity of leaders to continue improving standards across the curriculum, especially for disadvantaged pupils
  - how the most able pupils are challenged in mathematics
  - how effectively grammar, punctuation and spelling are taught
  - whether the early years curriculum enables boys to make good progress.
- The executive principal provides inspirational leadership and wants to achieve the very best for the pupils and community that the school serves. A strong team ethic among senior leaders gives a consistent message about high expectations and overcoming barriers to learning. Leaders responsible for key stages and subjects such as English and mathematics are having a demonstrable impact on raising standards in their areas of expertise.
- Leaders use coaching and monitoring effectively to ensure that teaching is consistently effective. As a result, disadvantaged pupils make strong progress as they go through the school. Differences in attainment diminish by the time pupils leave Hollington. Leadership of subjects other than English and mathematics is not yet well developed. Therefore, despite the focus on developing pupils' skills across the curriculum, progress and outcomes in other subjects other than English and mathematics are not yet consistently strong.
- In the last year a new approach to teaching mathematics has been introduced consistently throughout the school. Pupils enjoy the new approach to learning and are making good progress, especially in key stage 2. All pupils, including the most able, have daily opportunities to try problem-solving and reasoning activities to develop and embed their skills and knowledge. However, the new

approach is not yet as well embedded in key stage 1. The most able pupils in Year 6 receive extra challenge in school and at a local secondary school within the trust.

- In 2016 the outcomes of the key stage 2 grammar, punctuation and spelling tests were disappointing. This year, checks to ensure a consistent approach to teaching grammar, punctuation and spelling mean that pupils in key stage 2 are now developing their skills well. Meanwhile, in key stage 1 there have been annual improvements in the teaching of phonics and the outcomes in the phonics screening check. Those pupils who did not previously meet the standard are on track to do so this year.
- In the early years, those children with the lowest starting points are making the strongest progress to catch up with their peers. This includes many boys. Teacher-led activities in Reception encourage good language development and inspire children to want to mark-make and write. However, throughout Nursery and Reception some adults are less effective. They do not always model correct spoken language and do not engage sufficiently well with children to move their learning on. While adults show children great care, they do not always adapt the levels of supervision quickly enough to respond to children choosing different activities in the outside area.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- early years provision in Nursery and Reception is improved so that all adults have the skills and ability to promote spoken language well and move learning on quickly to help children progress
- strategies to improve the teaching of mathematics are embedded further, especially in key stage 1
- the curriculum is developed in subjects other than English and mathematics, so that pupils develop their skills well and subject leaders have an impact on raising standards
- they continue the relentless work with families to improve attendance.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chief executive of the Hastings Academies Trust, the regional schools commissioner, and the director of children's services for East Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lee Selby  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

I met with the executive principal, principal and vice-principal regularly throughout the day to discuss many aspects of the school's work. I looked at a range of safeguarding documentation including the single central register of recruitment checks. I carried out two learning walks with the executive principal and principal. We visited a sample of classrooms in each key stage to observe learning, look at pupils' work and talk to pupils. I met with four other leaders who have responsibility for a key stage or subject. We looked at a range of pupils' work together. I held discussions with three representatives of Hastings Academies Trust and the vice-chair of the governing body. I considered 40 responses to the online pupil survey and 16 responses to the staff survey. To gain their views of the school, I spoke to a number of parents at the start of the school day and held telephone discussions with two other parents. I considered 14 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View.