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Mr Matthew Dineen  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Dineen

### **Short inspection of Harold Court Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 24 May 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 the school was judged to be good in February 2013.

#### **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 as headteacher, you have worked with staff and governors to nurture high standards of behaviour and an atmosphere of high achievement. Pupils are encouraged to 'stay on gold' and meet high expectations in their behaviour and self-discipline. Teachers are encouraged to be flexible and to tailor their approach to meet the needs of different pupils. They plan work to make sure that it is set just at the right level but with that extra challenge. This encourages pupils to think and to apply their skills and knowledge. This, together with good behaviour, leads to pupils learning well and making good progress. Parents, staff and governors have confidence in both you and in the school.

The leadership team and governors have made progress on the areas identified for improvement in the previous inspection. Results in mathematics have improved. Results are also improving in other subjects. School leaders have refined the curriculum to introduce the 'learning challenge', a creative way of encouraging pupils to apply their writing skills across subjects. Pupils are responding well. Staff use carefully targeted interventions and support for pupils who have gaps in their learning and these are helping them to make good progress. The combined effect of all these actions is that outcomes in reading and writing are improving for all pupils irrespective of their starting points. Senior leaders aim to improve standards further with ambitions for more pupils to be achieving greater depth in the quality of their work.

You know that pupils' attendance needs to improve and it is, step-by-step, but not as rapidly as it needs to. You have introduced several initiatives with the aim of encouraging pupils to attend school regularly. Leaders' evaluation of some of these initiatives has not been rigorous or challenged sufficiently to ensure that they are having the impact intended. Leaders have worked with local authority advisers to review the use of pupil premium funding. However, leaders do not know with certainty whether some of the money set aside for supporting disadvantaged pupils is well spent and focused on the right activities with the right pupils. You and governors do not have the information you need to make decisions on whether the money could be better used, particularly to reduce persistent absence.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding arrangements are thorough and all staff have had appropriate training and guidance, including training on radicalisation and female genital mutilation. Good induction systems are in place to brief new staff about safeguarding matters. Records are detailed. You make all relevant checks on staff and volunteers who visit or work at the school. Governors monitor these records regularly.

The school's culture for safeguarding emphasises the importance of everyone listening, watching and acting appropriately to ensure that children are safe. Staff know to report any concerns they have about pupils. Staff are confident that leaders will take their concerns seriously and follow them up diligently. Representatives from the pupil parliament also keep a careful eye on pupils who they are concerned may be upset or unhappy. Pupils know how to use the internet safely and what to do if someone hurts them or is unkind.

Where there has been cause for leaders to act on serious concerns about individual pupils, this has been swift and with good involvement of external agencies. You set a very high threshold of expectation on agencies and do not let things slide if you consider their responses to be too slow. You rightly continue to pursue action with the care of the individual child as your major priority.

### **Inspection findings**

- My first focus for the inspection was to review how leaders are helping disadvantaged pupils apply their literacy skills in reading with meaning and understanding. In 2016, reading achievement was well below the national average by the end of Year 2, with few disadvantaged pupils reading with greater depth and understanding.
- The leadership team expects teachers to use the broad curriculum as a focus for all pupils to read across a range of interesting topics. Pupils in Year 3 use dictionaries and thesauruses to help self-check the meanings of words and sentences or find expressive words to improve their writing. Disadvantaged pupils are making good progress in reading. With well-targeted intervention and support, many have a firm grasp of basic literacy skills. They are confident in talking with a partner to check the meaning of words and phrases in the books or information they read. Pupils in Year 3 are beginning to read with understanding, and talk confidently about information they have been researching, for example in their work on Ancient Greece.

- Another focus of the inspection was how leaders are improving attendance overall, and reducing persistent absence among disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Attendance has been well below the national average for three years. Although there has been some improvement, attendance among disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has been too low. Persistent absence among disadvantaged pupils is in the top 10% of schools nationally.
- School leaders have introduced several initiatives and projects to support disadvantaged pupils. Some actions, including the offer of a breakfast club, have focused on improving attendance and have worked for some pupils. The employment of a pastoral leader and learning mentor has improved communication with families and ensured direct contact as soon as a pupil is absent. Attendance is improving but not fast enough. Leaders and governors are aware of the importance of reducing persistent absence, particularly among a small number of disadvantaged pupils, but some actions are insufficiently focused. Initiatives are not reviewed and analysed well to check whether they are having an impact.
- An additional focus for the inspection was how governors and leaders are supporting those pupils who are persistent absentees or at risk of exclusion, and ensuring that they are safe. The percentage of persistent absentees in 2016 was high and the number of fixed-term exclusions has been above the national average in recent years.
- The attendance officer is vigilant and tracks the attendance of those pupils with a pattern of poor attendance. The school support officer uses the information well to maintain communication with families and to involve external agencies where necessary. Support for teachers in managing behaviour and in diffusing potential flashpoints with those pupils exhibiting challenging behaviour has been successful. There have been no fixed-term exclusions this academic year.
- A final focus for the inspection was to review how leaders have ensured that pupils' improved achievement in writing in the 2016 Year 6 national assessments has been sustained and embedded across key stage 2 and all subjects.
- Improving writing is a high priority for the school. Teachers are creative and use a variety of methods and approaches, including the use of film, to encourage pupils to use a rich vocabulary and to motivate their writing. They create opportunities for pupils to talk through their ideas before they begin to write. This worked well in one classroom during the inspection where pupils worked together to write powerful descriptions of a picture of a dragon curling around the branch of a tree. Pupils challenged each other to extend their sentences into a paragraph and include richer vocabulary to build a story around the picture. Teachers adapt their approach appropriately and encourage pupils to consider what they need to do to be sure that their writing meets the 'what makes good' criteria set for them as a guide. Books and samples of written work for older pupils in the school show that they are making good progress in their writing. Some are writing extended reports and are beginning to write with good attention to style and presentation. However, not all writing activities capture the interest of pupils or encourage them to 'go the extra mile' in trying to improve the quality and depth of their written work.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the effect of initiatives and use of pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils are evaluated and used to inform future planning to be sure that resources are deployed to maximum impact
- they implement a tightly focused strategy and set of actions to rapidly improve attendance within the small group of pupils who are persistently absent
- they improve the consistency of progress made by disadvantaged pupils in reading and writing at greater depth.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Wagstaff  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

I had discussions with senior leaders about actions they had put in place to improve the school and how they knew that these actions had been successful. Several leaders and staff were interviewed about safeguarding and also about initiatives to support disadvantaged pupils and to improve attendance. 'Learning walks' took place with the headteacher, including observing some lessons in Years 1, 3 and 5. Samples of pupils' work were reviewed. I analysed a range of school documents linked to the school's self-evaluation and improvement priorities. I met with members of the governing body. I also spoke on the telephone to a member of the local authority, and with pupils who were on a school extended visit. The 75 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were reviewed, as were the 20 responses to the staff questionnaire.