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Mr Christian Markham
Interim Headteacher
Horizon Primary Academy
Hilda May Avenue
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Dear Mr Markham

Short inspection of Horizon Primary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 7 February 2018, 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 September 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Leaders, governors and the trust have managed a recent period of change and transition in leadership effectively. As interim headteacher you are supported ably by the deputy and senior leadership team. The school's journey of improvement has not been affected adversely by changes in leadership. Pupils' progress at the end of Year 6 in 2017 for reading, writing and mathematics was among the highest nationally, and progress continues to rise across the school for all groups of pupils.

Leaders have created a culture and ethos of high expectations in which staff and pupils strive to do their best. Staff are empowered to take risks and to try new ideas that will be of benefit to pupils. For example, a series of outdoor lessons are being used to improve the standard of boys' writing by helping them to imagine settings and situations. A central feature of what the school provides is the 'learning by doing' education, especially through your weekly engagement in scouting that involves all pupils and staff. This initiative is being used to allow pupils to learn through experience and they say it is something that they really enjoy, especially 'earning badges', for example in first aid.

Pupils love school and say there is very little they would like to change. They say that lessons are fun and interesting. Pupils are inspired by the broad and stimulating curriculum, and this is shown in the displays of work in classrooms and around the school. Pupils' behaviour in lessons is exemplary, pupils respect their teachers and want to make progress.

Parents and staff show high rates of support for the school. Staff are proud to work at the school and are ambitious for all pupils. Parents trust and respect leaders and staff and appreciate the help that the school provides for families in the community. A parent, reflecting the views of others, commented, 'I feel the staff at Horizon really support the children's well-being and that it's at the centre of the school's approach'.

Leaders identify precisely the school's main strengths and those areas that could be further finessed. For example, they know that more pupils could be working at a greater depth of understanding in writing and mathematics. Along with other leaders, you have gathered first-hand information to inform your judgement. As a result, everyone is clear about how the school can improve further, and leaders are taking the right actions to make improvements.

The previous inspection highlighted several strengths of the school, and these aspects continue to be strong. Leaders and governors were asked to further improve the following areas: making more teaching consistently good or better; asking questions to challenge pupils to think hard and work independently; handwriting; and raising the level of attendance to be in line with the national average. Leaders have successfully addressed these recommendations and you continue to drive for even better outcomes. You are now focusing on ensuring that the attendance of individual pupils continues to rise, so that persistent absence reduces further.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff are well informed and know about the school's processes for keeping pupils safe. Systems to ensure that all adults receive the training that they need are efficient and managed well. You work effectively with other agencies to support vulnerable pupils and their families, including making timely referrals to social services and healthcare professionals.

Pupils say that they feel safe. For example, they know what bullying is and say that this is rare in the school. If bullying happens, pupils, staff and the majority of parents agree that this is resolved in a satisfactory manner. Pupils trust school staff and can explain how to keep safe in different situations, for example when working online. The vast majority of pupils want to come to school and attend regularly.

Inspection findings

- Pupils' progress at the end of key stage 2 in 2016 and 2017 in reading and mathematics was significantly above average and in the highest 10% of all pupils nationally. The numbers of pupils working at the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was at or above the national average.
- I saw clear evidence that teachers routinely question and challenge pupils. Examples include asking pupils to explain their reasoning in detail and challenging them to use a wider vocabulary. This is as a result of focused staff training and development. Consequently, a greater proportion of pupils are beginning to work at a greater depth of understanding in writing and mathematics. Evidence of this is seen in pupils' work and in their approach to more challenging tasks.
- Leaders have identified mathematics as an area for development in early years and key stage 1. As a result, teachers are planning more learning that focuses pupils on reasoning and problem-solving. Teachers' questioning ensures that all pupils are appropriately challenged. I saw evidence of misconceptions being identified and addressed immediately. Pupils are given appropriate time to explore their thinking and to question themselves and others. As a result of these measures, more pupils in early years and key stage 1 are working at the expected standard for their age in mathematics.
- Resourceful use of additional funding makes a real difference to the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders ensure that the large numbers of disadvantaged pupils receive appropriately tailored support. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils' rates of progress continue to be rapid and significantly above the national average.
- Governors play an active role in evaluating the school's effectiveness and know the school well. They monitor school performance closely, gathering first-hand information to inform their discussions and decisions. Governors monitor closely the impact of the pupil premium grant to ensure that disadvantaged pupils learn well.
- Leaders' high expectations and well-considered strategies have improved attendance. The senior leadership team monitors attendance information well to ensure that problems are followed up. Both the attendance officer and the well-being coordinator provide effective support for families when absence becomes a problem. There have been some significant individual successes. However, persistent absence remains above the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- rates of attendance continue to improve, particularly for pupils who are persistently absent.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive

officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Marcia Goodwin
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I held meetings with you and senior leaders, the English and mathematics subject leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, the well-being coordinator, the attendance officer, the pupil premium champion, members of the governing body and representatives of the multi-academy trust. I met with a group of pupils from Years 1 to 6, and spoke with many other pupils informally and during lessons. Together with your deputy headteacher, we observed learning across the school and looked at examples of pupils' work. I scrutinised a variety of documents, including the school's own evaluation of its performance, records of checks that leaders make on the suitability of adults to work with children, and information relating to attendance. I took account of responses to questionnaires from 36 pupils and 27 members of staff, and 53 responses from parents to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, including free-text comments.