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Mr Gwyn Pritchard
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Pritchard

Short inspection of Parkgate Infants' and Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 06 July 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Effective steps have been taken to implement the recommendations from the previous inspection.

Since your appointment as acting headteacher in September 2017, which was substantiated in January 2018, you have been clear about the actions you needed to take to improve further all aspects of the school. You have been ably supported in this work by your acting deputy headteacher and have the undivided support of all staff. Those who responded to Ofsted's survey all agree that the school is well led and managed. Additionally, staff say that they enjoy working at Parkgate Infants' and Nursery School and that they feel well supported.

On taking up the role of headteacher, you rightly identified mathematics as an area for development. This is because outcomes in mathematics at the end of key stage 1 in 2017 were not as strong as those in reading and writing. You also wanted to strengthen practice in the early years and leadership across the school. You have made effective use of the support offered by local authority advisers to support leaders and teachers to develop new approaches to teaching, learning and assessment and also to provide high-quality training for them. In mathematics, there has been a focus on developing pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills through the greater use of practical apparatus, which supports the development of pupils' mathematical thinking. In the early years, a new approach has also been introduced to ensure that children are better prepared for Year 1. As a result of these initiatives, differences between outcomes in mathematics and reading and

writing at the end of key stage 1 are diminishing. The proportion of children achieving the expected good level of development at the end of the Reception Year has also increased. You have identified that the next steps for improvement in the early years are for more children to exceed the expected standard. Additionally, leadership across the school has been strengthened.

Parents and carers are highly supportive of the school and your leadership. They particularly appreciate the opportunities they have to speak to you before and after school and on the playground, and the willingness and availability of all teachers whenever parents have something to discuss. Parents that I spoke to at the start of the day and those who responded to Ofsted's online text questionnaire are very happy with the school. Many commented on the strong community feel of the school and the support that is provided for them and their families, as well as for the children who attend the school. Typical comments included: 'This school has provided a fantastic education so far in my child's journey. The support and guidance both for children and parents alike has been fantastic. There is a real sense of family here.'

The school is calm and orderly. Pupils' attitudes to learning are highly positive and their behaviour both in lessons and around the school is consistently excellent. Pupils take pride in their work, which they present neatly, and they are confident and polite when talking to adults about their learning. All pupils who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire say that they enjoy learning and feel safe in school.

Governors are highly committed and play a significant role in school life. They ensure that they are well trained and have all the necessary skills to both support and challenge leaders. Recently, they commissioned a review of their effectiveness from the local authority to ensure that they were working as effectively as possible. They pay regular and focused visits to the school and receive up-to-date information about all aspects of its performance from leaders. Consequently, they are well informed and operate effectively.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all staff receive appropriate and regular safeguarding training. Additionally, designated safeguarding leads have all received the appropriate level of training. There are strong safeguarding systems and procedures, and all staff understand their roles in keeping pupils safe at school. All aspects of safe recruitment are in place. Records of adults' suitability to work with children are clear and comprehensive. You maintain well-kept records of any concerns raised about pupils. You ensure that timely action is taken if there are any indications that a pupil is at risk of harm.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry to ascertain whether the school continues to be good was to check whether all groups of pupils are making good progress from the end of the early years. This was because there were some indications within published

information in 2017 that some groups were not doing as well as others. This included some pupils identified as being disadvantaged. There were also some differences in the attainment of boys and girls at the end of key stage 1. In 2017, more girls reached the expected standard for writing than boys, and more boys reached the expected standard than girls in mathematics. Overall, a lower proportion of pupils reached the expected standard in mathematics than in reading and writing.

- Together, we looked at learning across the school in lessons and in pupils' books. The new approach to teaching mathematics, which you introduced this year, is giving more emphasis to the use of equipment and diagrams to help pupils to visualise mathematical problems and develop their reasoning. I saw that boys and girls alike are benefiting from this approach. School tracking information and the work in books indicates that differences between boys and girls are diminishing in mathematics. Teacher assessments indicate that, this year, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics at the end of Year 2 is likely to be above the 2017 average.
- Pupils' writing in their English books and in a range of other subjects is of good quality and well presented. The new approach, which encourages pupils to edit their writing in order to improve it, is having a positive impact. I identified many examples of boys and girls clearly writing at age-related expectations in both Year 1 and Year 2. Additionally, I saw that effective curriculum planning is increasing pupils' enjoyment of writing. This is especially the case for boys. For example, in a Year 2 lesson, all pupils showed high levels of engagement and produced good-quality work when writing instructions for 'how to steal the lamp back'. This was cleverly linked to pupils' planned performance of the play 'Aladdin'.
- Leaders track pupils' progress regularly and carefully. Any pupil who is identified as falling behind receives effective additional support to help them to catch up, both within class and through additional sessions. This includes those who are disadvantaged. Consequently, these pupils, as well as other pupils, are making good progress from their starting points. You have rightly identified that increasing the proportion of all pupils who achieve greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 is an area for further improvement.
- My second line of enquiry related to attendance. This has been below the national average for primary schools for the last three years. Additionally, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has also been above average.
- You have rigorous systems in place to check attendance and are quick to follow up on any absences. You work closely with parents to support them in ensuring that their children attend regularly, in particular those whose children are in the Reception Year. As soon as a child's attendance drops, a graduated response is instigated, culminating in a referral to the local authority attendance team. You shared evidence with me which shows that a few pupils persistently arrive late to school. This means that they are recorded as absent, which influences the overall figures for attendance despite the fact that these pupils are not actually absent. You have been working hard to support parents to bring their children to school on time.

- Current attendance information shows that your work is having a positive impact, but you are aware that there is further work to be done to encourage all parents to ensure that their children attend school regularly and arrive on time.
- Finally, I wanted to check whether leaders have the capacity to ensure sustained development and improvement. Since your appointment as headteacher, you have introduced a number of ideas to improve the school further, including strengthening leadership. Inspection evidence indicates that your actions are having a positive impact on pupils' learning and progress. You are ambitious for the school to continue to develop and have appropriate plans to build on recent advances in mathematics, the early years and leadership capacity. Consequently, the school is well placed to make continued and sustained improvement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- new teaching approaches are consolidated, so that progress and outcomes in English and mathematics improve still further and more pupils exceed the expected standards at the end of key stage 1
- the proportion of children who achieve a good level of development at the end of the early years continues to rise and that more children exceed the expected standard
- they continue to work with the minority of families who do not ensure that their children attend school regularly and arrive on time, and that they implement appropriate sanctions where necessary.

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

Joan Beale
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

We discussed the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, the school's self-evaluation of its performance, plans for future improvement and information about current pupils' progress and attainment.

I met with subject and senior leaders and four governors. Additionally, I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.

We visited all classrooms together to observe teaching, learning and assessment, and looked at the work in pupils' books in a range of subjects.

I met with a group of pupils to talk about their experiences at school and also talked more informally with pupils in lessons and at breaktime. I scrutinised safeguarding policies and practice, including systems for safe recruitment of staff.

The views of 65 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account, as well as 26 responses using the free-text service. Additionally, I met with a parent who requested a meeting with me. I also considered the views of the parents I spoke with during the inspection and those who had responded to the school's own questionnaire. The views of staff and pupils who responded to their respective surveys were also taken in to account.