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Miss Claire Martin  
Headteacher  
Merdon Junior School  
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Dear Miss Martin

### **Short inspection of Merdon Junior School**

Following my visit to the school on 16 July 2019, 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 June 2015.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have established a positive and nurturing learning environment where pupils enjoy learning and love coming to school. The school's values of IGNITE (independence, growth mindset, never giving up, innovators, team-workers and evaluators) and HEART (honesty, excellence, attitude, respect and thoughtfulness) underpin the school's work, and they are important to pupils and parents. Pupils are friendly and welcoming, playing and working together harmoniously.

Senior leaders know the school's strengths and priorities for improvement very well because they have checked thoroughly on the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' outcomes. This has enabled leaders to focus their actions sharply to bring about improvements in teaching, particularly in mathematics. The local authority has provided you with effective guidance and support to assist you in your work.

At the time of the last inspection, you were asked to improve teaching and pupils' attainment by ensuring that pupils' work is set at the right level of difficulty and that pupils understand what they are expected to learn. You have successfully addressed these issues. You have implemented effective teaching strategies and ensure that all staff are well trained, skilled and knowledgeable. Teachers ensure that learning is pitched at the right level for pupils' prior attainment and that it is suitably challenging. Teachers and teaching assistants question pupils skilfully to deepen and extend pupils' ideas. Teachers share skills planning with the pupils in order to

outline the skills that pupils will be taught on their learning journey. This strategy enables pupils to understand the purpose of their learning and the next steps in their learning. Over the past three years, the proportions of pupils who attained the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined, at the end of Year 6, have increased. In 2018, the figure was above the national average.

Most pupils work with concentration and a commitment to do well. They work together collaboratively, sharing and exploring their ideas with one another thoughtfully and respectfully. Most of the time, pupils' work is presented neatly and with pride. Pupils develop neat, joined handwriting that is fluent and legible.

The vast majority of parents speak highly of the work of the school and the improvements that have been made. As one parent said, 'The school has gone from strength to strength.' Others reflected the views of many when they said that the school has a very positive atmosphere and a nurturing attitude and that the children are listened to and valued.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You have established a culture throughout the school where pupils' safety and well-being are a priority. Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Safeguarding leads provide all staff with regular training and guidance so that they have a very good understanding of how to keep pupils safe. Your electronic system for recording and reporting concerns enables you to keep well-organised and thorough records. You ensure that all the appropriate pre-employment checks are completed on all adults working in school. The record of these checks is thorough. Governors ensure that the school's safeguarding procedures are routinely monitored as part of their work to ensure that pupils are kept safe from harm.

Pupils are happy at school and they feel safe. They say that bullying is rare but, if it does occur, adults are very quick to deal with it. As one pupil said, 'It is such a lovely school, and the staff are really supportive.' Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including when online.

### **Inspection findings**

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed to explore three key aspects of the school's work. These were: how effectively teaching challenges pupils in writing and mathematics; the extent to which leaders' actions are improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils; and the effectiveness of governance.
- You and your deputy headteacher have embedded a successful approach to the teaching of mathematics. Teachers design tasks that challenge pupils to explore their mathematical understanding in different ways and to deepen their mathematical thinking. Teachers make effective use of concrete resources and pictorial representations to support pupils' mathematical understanding. Pupils use these strategies with confidence to tackle increasingly complex problems involving increasingly bigger numbers. Tasks are planned to provide additional

support for those pupils who need it. Such activities allow pupils to revisit their prior learning and to practise new strategies that are due to be taught during the following lesson. This enables these pupils to gain greater confidence in their learning, prior to the lesson. Pupils are making strong progress in mathematics, including the most able pupils. They are able to articulate their understanding confidently and accurately using mathematical vocabulary.

- In 2018, the progress that pupils made in writing, at the end of key stage 2, was below the national average. In response to this, you refined the school's approach to the teaching of writing and established a strong link between reading and writing. Class texts are selected carefully to engage pupils' interest and to inspire them in their writing. Teachers challenge pupils to use and apply a wide variety of language to enrich and enliven their writing. Teachers provide pupils with helpful support and feedback to improve their written work. Pupils then take ownership of editing and improving their writing by, for example, using thesauruses to improve their vocabulary choice. Pupils are given regular opportunities to write in depth in different subjects across the curriculum. For instance, in science, pupils wrote an explanation of how the heart works, and, in geography, pupils wrote persuasive letters about the impact of plastic waste. Pupils are beginning to make stronger progress than previously in their writing. These developments, however, are not fully embedded across all areas of the school.
- In recent years, disadvantaged pupils have not achieved as highly as their peers at the end of key stage 2. You have worked closely with the school's inclusion leader to address this. Together you monitor regularly the individual progress of disadvantaged pupils. You and your inclusion leader know these pupils very well. You have made effective use of additional funding to target the support that these pupils need to tackle their barriers to learning. The school's emotional literacy and pastoral support staff provide targeted support for pupils' mental health and well-being. You have also implemented a wide range of interventions and additional support during lessons, including pre-classroom learning activities. As a result, disadvantaged pupils are now making strong progress. School leaders recognise that there is further work to be done to ensure that these pupils catch up to where they should be.
- Governors are actively involved in the life of the school, providing leaders with an effective balance of support and challenge. Governors have undertaken appropriate training to develop their skills and to enable them to fulfil their roles and responsibilities well. Governors undertake regular visits to the school and routinely scrutinise information about pupils' outcomes, including the attainment and progress of pupils from vulnerable groups. Consequently, governors are very knowledgeable about the work of the school, what its strengths are and what leaders have prioritised as areas for improvement. When governors visit the school, they focus sharply on these key priorities to check on the impact of leaders' actions on pupils' outcomes.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- strengths in the teaching of writing are embedded so that pupils make the progress of which they are capable
- the provision for disadvantaged pupils is further developed so that these pupils make better progress and catch up with their peers nationally.

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

Yours sincerely

Leah Goulding  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you and your deputy headteacher to discuss the work of leaders and the school's self-evaluation. In addition, I held a meeting with members of the governing body and met with a representative from the local authority. Together with you and your deputy headteacher, I visited five classes across the school. We observed pupils' learning and spoke to pupils about their work. I also looked at work in pupils' books with you and your deputy headteacher. During breaktime and lunchtime, I spoke informally with pupils, asking them for their views on the school.

I reviewed a range of relevant documents from the school website and some provided by you and your team, including the school's safeguarding arrangements and the central record of recruitment checks on staff. I spoke to parents at the end of the school day and also took account of 58 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 38 free-text responses. There were 16 responses to the survey for staff and 249 responses to the pupils' survey, which were also considered.