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Mr Robin Goodier
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Goodier

Short inspection of Holt Farm Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 26 September 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 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.

Pupils learn in a caring, friendly and stimulating environment. They are encouraged and supported so that they can achieve their best. Pupils are happy and enjoy coming to school. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of your leadership. One parent captured the views of many by writing: 'An absolutely amazing school, led brilliantly by Mr Goodier and his team.' Another stated: 'A lovely busy school and my child is very happy and interested in what they do every day. The after-school clubs are fantastic.'

Areas of improvement from the previous inspection have been successfully tackled. For example, the most able pupils are given work that is suitably challenging. Looking at the work of some of your most able pupils, I saw examples of high-quality work, especially in writing and mathematics.

You and your staff are dedicated and ambitious for each child to reach his or her full potential. Governors are committed to school improvement. They check the work of school leaders to make sure that standards continue to rise. Your evaluation of the work of the school is accurate and you have identified appropriate areas for improvement.

Children in Reception learn in a lively learning environment. The structure of the

children's day and teaching methods have helped them to quickly settle into school. You explained that this is the result of recent changes you have made. Learning activities are engaging and stimulating. Adults make sure that activities are matched to the needs of the individual child. As a result, children are happy and make good progress.

Behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. Children play well together in the playground and follow the school rules. Relationships between pupils and adults are very positive. Pupils are enthusiastic learners and most are attentive in lessons. Disruption in lessons is therefore rare.

You are determined to provide pupils with a broad and balanced curriculum in order to develop their interests and talents. Pupils are taught humanities, science and creative subjects through motivating topics which are often enhanced by trips. For example, Year 2 visited the zoo when studying the rainforest. Sport and physical education are a real strength of the school. Pupils have the chance to learn a wide range of sports in lessons and through after-school clubs. Pupils compete in local competitions and sports festivals. Parents are highly appreciative of the clubs and activities available. The curriculum makes good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have made sure that procedures for keeping pupils safe meet the latest guidance and that all staff are appropriately trained. Staff know the pupils well and, as a result, they are quick to identify and report safeguarding concerns. When a concern is raised, record-keeping of actions taken is fit for purpose. You work well with outside organisations to make sure that pupils get the support they need. Pupils with medical needs are supported by appropriately trained staff.

Relationships between pupils are good and they show respect for one another. Bullying is rare. Pupils who find it difficult to manage their behaviour are well supported by adults. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations through curriculum topics, assemblies and visiting speakers. During my visit, pupils in Years 1 and 2 attended a presentation by the local police on e-safety.

Inspection findings

- One of the areas we explored was the work you have undertaken to improve attendance, especially for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and for disadvantaged pupils. We looked at this because, historically, the attendance of these groups of pupils has been well below average.
- You and the attendance team have worked effectively to improve attendance for these groups of pupils. For example, home visits by the attendance officer and running a breakfast club are two of the strategies that have led to reduced absence. Attendance overall is in line with the national average.

- Teachers set work that is interesting and at an appropriate level for the ability of the pupils. Work in the books of the most able pupils demonstrates the high expectations of staff, for example in mathematics, where pupils use a range of methods to solve interesting problems. The written work of the most able pupils demonstrates good use of vocabulary and techniques to interest the reader. For example, the opening paragraph of a piece of writing by a Year 2 pupil started, 'If you want to know what happened when we visited the zoo then read on...'.
- Lower- and middle-ability pupils are making good progress because the work is well matched to their levels of skill and understanding. Pupils are provided with resources to help them improve their learning. Pupils who are falling behind benefit from one-to-one support that quickly helps them catch up.
- We agreed that an area that needs to be improved is the quality of pupils' handwriting. You have not established a set of expectations on how pupils should write letters and present their work. As a result, handwriting varies from being neat and legible to difficult to read. This was seen in books across all year groups.
- I looked at how you use the extra funds received to help disadvantaged pupils with phonics. You agreed that this was a suitable area to focus on because this was an area for improvement identified by senior leaders. In previous years, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils in Years 1 and 2 meeting the expected standard in phonics has been below average.
- Over the last year, you have made changes to phonics teaching. The school is using a new phonics programme and has changed how pupils are taught. Teachers carefully check pupils' progress in lessons. Those pupils who are struggling with a letter sound are given extra help so that they do not fall behind. The proportion of all pupils meeting the expected standard in 2017 was in line with the national average. The number of disadvantaged pupils meeting expectations improved but remained below average. We agreed that this is still an area of improvement for the school.
- Finally, I looked at the progress pupils are making in subjects other than English and mathematics. Books show that pupils make good progress in science. Topics are interesting and learning activities give pupils the opportunity to develop enquiry skills which are often fun, for example constructing a human skeleton using pasta to show the different bone shapes. The percentage of pupils leaving Year 2 having met the expected standard in science met the national average in 2016.
- In subjects such as history, geography and design technology, pupils are learning the skills and knowledge that will prepare them for key stage 2. Pupils have the chance to use their writing, reading and mathematics knowledge and skills in these subjects. Work in books indicates that most pupils are making good progress across the curriculum.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- attainment in phonics continues to improve, especially for disadvantaged pupils
- the standard of handwriting and presentation improves in the early years and key stage 1.

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

Yours sincerely

Caroline Pardy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held discussions with you, the deputy headteacher and the early years leader. I also met with four members of the governing body. I visited classrooms with senior leaders to evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and to talk informally with them about their experiences of the school. I looked at work in pupils' exercise books to review the quality of pupils' work over time. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school in lessons and at lunchtime, when I also spoke to them informally. You and I also visited the breakfast club. I considered your improvement plan, self-evaluation and policies relating to behaviour and keeping pupils safe. I checked the documents on the website. I considered the views of 60 parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including 32 free-text responses. I also took account of the 66 responses to the school's own parent questionnaire.