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Mrs Hayley Kotze
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Kotze

Short inspection of Shears Green Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 14 March 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 June 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 after the last inspection, you have successfully led the school through a period of staffing and leadership changes. You, senior leaders and governors share the commitment, determination and ambition to forge further improvements.

Parents are very positive about all aspects of the school and have confidence in your leadership. The inspection findings endorse the view of a parent who wrote, 'I have seen the school go from strength to strength. I believe the current headteacher is extremely focused and effective.'

Pupils learn in a cheerful, safe and calm atmosphere and successfully demonstrate the school's motto of 'Happy, Confident Achievers'. Several parents expressed their delight with their children's enthusiasm for school. 'Our child comes home enthused about learning and talks about school a lot' and 'The curriculum is exciting; my child is always bursting with enthusiasm – he loves school' are typical of the many comments made. There are excellent relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils behave well, enjoy learning and want to do well. They are proud of their achievements. Pupils are well looked after and flourish in a nurturing, caring ethos. One parent noted initial concerns about her child attending such a large school but wrote that, 'It is clear that the small, caring touches are still there.'

You are continuing to develop a strong senior leadership team and increasing the accountability of leaders at all levels successfully. Together with senior leaders, you have correctly focused on raising pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics and ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning remains good, despite the changes in staffing. The checks that you and senior leaders make on all aspects of pupils' learning give you a clear steer for improvement. Your staff work well as a supportive team who appreciate the opportunities to enhance their skills so they can provide the best for the pupils. Morale is high, and staff are good role models for pupils and are proud to be part of the school.

You have worked successfully to tackle the issues identified as needing improvement from the previous inspection. Teachers plan work for groups of different abilities in their classes. Pupils are generally clear about how they can improve their work to make the best gains in their learning. You acknowledge, however, that there remain a few inconsistencies across the classes in the progress that pupils make, particularly those who are disadvantaged and those who are most-able. You are taking the correct actions to address these aspects by providing effective support and guidance to staff where appropriate.

You, senior leaders and governors have demonstrated clear capacity to make further improvement. Governors are very knowledgeable about the school's strengths and areas for further development. They are well informed by you and by their own monitoring visits as well as the views of pupils, parents and staff. The school benefits from governors' experience and expertise and the good balance of challenge and support that they provide.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You and the other designated safeguarding leaders have undertaken the appropriate training. You make sure that all staff are aware of their responsibility in keeping children safe and that they are vigilant in doing so. There is a culture of safeguarding embedded in the school as the safety and well-being of all pupils is of the utmost importance to you.

All staff are well informed about the procedures for raising any concerns so that the needs of pupils are met effectively and rapidly. All staff know pupils and their families very well. There is good communication between home and school and parents said that they appreciate the open-door policy should they have any questions or queries. You work well with external agencies should any child protection issues arise. Record-keeping is secure, detailed and of high quality. All statutory checks on adults are made and recorded carefully on the single central register.

Pupils said they feel safe, happy and well looked after in school. You make good use of visitors to the school, such as the police, fire fighters and road safety officers to teach pupils about staying safe, including when using technology and the internet. All parents who responded to the online survey, Parent View, and all those who

responded to the school's own questionnaire agreed that the school keeps their children safe. One parent wrote, 'The school promotes a warm, friendly, safe environment which has helped my child's confidence to flourish.'

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, in addition to the effectiveness of safeguarding, we agreed to focus on the teaching of phonics skills and reading, the progress of different groups, including that of disadvantaged pupils, and how well you are working to improve pupils' attendance.
- Children get a good start to school in the Reception Year. They make good progress from their starting points. In 2016, the proportion of children who reached a good level of development by the end of the early years was above that found nationally. Children make good progress in developing their communication and language and early reading and writing skills. They play and work together very well and develop confidence, independence and a love of learning that prepares them well for key stage 1.
- One of your key priorities has been to improve pupils' attainment in phonics. Recent changes in the teaching of phonics have had a positive impact on pupils' progress. In 2016, there was a marked increase from the previous two years in the proportion of pupils who reached the required standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check, although it remained below that found nationally. Your assessment information indicates that this improving trend will continue. The proportion on track to reach the required standard in the current Year 1 is set to rise further. Pupils use their phonics skills well to help them read and write unfamiliar words. Staff are skilled in teaching phonics through the new approach that the school has adopted. They are now focusing on helping pupils in Year 2 who did not achieve the required standard in Year 1 to catch up quickly.
- More pupils in Year 2 achieved the expected standards in writing and mathematics than the national average in 2016. Reading was in line with the national average. As well as building on the pupils' better phonics skills, which they had when they started in Year 2, you have made sure that reading has a high priority in each class. Resources are plentiful, displayed well and of good quality to grab pupils' attention and promote a love of books. Several initiatives, including powerful links between reading and writing, small-group guided reading sessions and an online reading programme help develop pupils' comprehension skills. As a result of these successful approaches, current pupils are making good progress and a higher proportion is on track to reach the expected standard in reading by the end of Year 2.
- You have made sure that there are rigorous systems in place for tracking pupils' progress carefully so that any additional help needed for groups or individuals is provided quickly. As a result, overall progress is good and sometimes pupils make very rapid progress. You correctly identified, however, that current progress is sometimes uneven for different groups in different classes, including for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Sometimes challenges for pupils are not always consistently high enough, particularly for the most able pupils. This means that, from their starting points, some pupils are not always

making the rapid progress of which they are capable to enable them to work at a greater depth.

- You and governors keep a close check on the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils to make sure it is making a difference. Although there remain differences between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils compared to that of other pupils nationally, current information shows that their progress is improving. However, you have again correctly identified that for some disadvantaged pupils, including those who are most-able, progress should be further accelerated to ensure that they catch up.
- You rightly continue to focus on promoting regular attendance for all pupils. Your work has ensured that overall attendance has improved and that the proportion of pupils who have higher rates of absence has declined. You rigorously track and analyse the attendance of different groups and do all that you can to support families to ensure that their children attend school regularly.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are challenged further to do the very best they can
- in all classes, all groups of pupils consistently make the rapid progress of which they are capable from their different starting points.

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

Yours sincerely

Margaret Coussins
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, senior leaders, other staff with key leadership responsibilities and the co-chairs of the governing body. I had a telephone conversation with the senior improvement adviser from the local authority. You accompanied me on my visits to most of the classes. During these visits, I spoke to pupils about their learning, looked at their books and listened to some pupils read. I observed pupils at playtime and lunchtime. I took account of 21 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, which included 14 written responses. I also took account of 105 responses to the school's own recent survey of parents and spoke to

a parent at the beginning of the day. I considered 22 responses to the staff questionnaire and 27 responses to the pupil questionnaire. I reviewed the school's website and sampled a range of documents and records including your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness, information about pupils' progress and documents relating to safeguarding.

