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John Sarbutts
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Dear Mr Sarbutts

Short inspection of Harlestone Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 30 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Harlestone Primary School is federated with Brington Primary School, forming the Althorp Partnership of Primary Schools. You took up your post as executive headteacher of both schools in January 2015. Since then, you have presided over significant changes to staffing and improvements to the quality of teaching and learning. There are two classes at Harlestone Primary School. One is taught across the week by two teachers and the other has a full time teacher. Another teacher has recently begun to teach the Year 6 pupils during the mornings. All of these teachers have been appointed since your arrival. Staff and governors alike recognise your passion for small schools and your drive to exploit the benefits of being a small school, while being sufficiently outward looking to capitalise on the advantages of being part of a federation and a cluster of local schools.

Upon your arrival, you immediately recognised that there was work to do to improve the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils. Your predecessor, an interim headteacher, supported by the governing body, had already begun this task. They had restructured the management team across the federation so that both schools had a lead teacher with responsibility for teaching and learning. You have built upon this strong foundation so that the leaders and staff across both schools work together to plan learning and improve the quality of teaching across the schools.

At the time of the last inspection of Harlestone school, inspectors asked leaders to improve pupils' reading skills. Since your arrival, you have reinvigorated the school's approach to teaching reading. You have included the pupils in choosing new books for the school library, introduced book clubs and ensured a consistency of approach to the teaching of reading. Pupils say they enjoy reading now. Pupils at the early stages of reading make effective use of their skills in phonics to work out unfamiliar words. More accomplished readers have distinct choices of authors and say that one of the best things about reading is that it broadens their vocabulary. By the end of 2016, every pupil at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2 reached at least the expected level in reading for their age. Your school's assessment information shows that current pupils are making strong progress in reading.

Leaders were also asked to ensure that staff are developed professionally. Your teaching and learning leaders work very well together. They have provided useful training for staff to be able to implement new approaches to reading, writing and mathematics since your arrival. They have checked to make sure that teachers are implementing the strategies. With you, they check every term that pupils are making strong progress. They support teachers to put appropriate interventions in place if a pupil's rate of progress slows.

Finally, leaders were asked to make sure that the targets set for staff performance are clearly measurable. You and I discussed this and looked at your approach to managing staff performance. The targets you set are clearly measurable and demonstrate ambition for pupils' achievement.

You recognised very early in your tenure that the pupils of Harlestone were capable of better progress than they had been making. This has been a relentless focus of your approach to school improvement. You have successfully introduced a new approach to teaching mathematics, writing and handwriting. During our visits to classrooms, and as we examined pupils' books, we saw that pupils' handwriting has improved considerably this year. Pupils, themselves, recognise this. However, we also saw that while teachers are ensuring that pupils learn new punctuation skills in their English lessons, they are not all putting these skills into practice regularly. Too often, pupils are only using simple punctuation when they write in other subjects. In mathematics lessons, we saw teachers using their good subject knowledge and well-considered questions effectively so that pupils deepened their understanding of mathematical concepts. Your own assessment information shows that most pupils, including the children in the Reception class, are making strong progress this year across English and mathematics. The books we looked at confirmed this.

Six parents responded to the online survey, Parent View. Those who did, and those who spoke with me on the playground were very complimentary about the school. They appreciate the 'small-knit family school' ethos with staff having 'the best interests of the children at heart'. They agreed that their children are safe and happy at the school. Families are welcomed at events such as the 'Grandparents' tea party' and 'bacon butties for dads' to celebrate Father's Day.

Around school, pupils are courteous in their interactions with their peers and adults. Older pupils act as 'buddies' for younger pupils. For example, during the inspection, they held the hands of their young friends as the whole school walked to the church for the Easter service.

Governors are ambitious for the school. They readily acknowledge that over recent years significant changes had to be made to ensure that pupils receive a good standard of education at the school. They have an accurate view of the strengths of the school and a clear understanding of their strategic role. For example, the chair of governors is currently restructuring the governors' committees to include a sharper focus on safeguarding, so that governors can be constantly assured this important aspect of the work of the school is of the highest quality.

The local authority has provided useful support to the school since your arrival. As a new headteacher, they have ensured that you have support and guidance from an experienced headteacher locally. You have welcomed this with open arms and made very good use of this support, not only for yourself, but also to improve the skills of your staff and the provision across the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You ensure that all staff and volunteers undergo the necessary vetting checks before starting at Harlestone School. Staff and governors receive up-to-date training and know how to raise a concern about a pupil's welfare, should one arise.

The school's curriculum helps pupils to understand how to keep themselves safe, for example when they cycle on the roads or when they use the internet. Information in the school library reminds pupils of the appropriate ages to be accessing social media and how to manage incidents of cyber bullying. Pupils spoke with confidence about how to keep themselves safe when they use modern technology. You arranged for an external consultant to run workshops for pupils, staff and parents to inform them about how to keep children safe online. Pupils told me that they are safe in school. Following a recent event to celebrate Mother's Day, despite pupils being keen to return to school, teachers ensured that they stayed inside the venue until all the parents' cars had left. One teacher had declared, 'Safety before learning!' Pupils appreciate that staff keep them safe. They told me that bullying just does not happen at Harlestone. They were confident, however, that if it ever did, an adult would deal with it for them.

Inspection findings

- Harlestone is a very small school. This means that the numbers of pupils in each cohort are too small to sensibly consider trends in assessment data. With this in mind, you have developed a system to track the progress that each individual pupil makes in reading, writing and mathematics. This enables you and your teachers to provide pupils with work that matches their next steps in learning. Your school assessment information shows that current pupils are making

stronger progress this year.

- The school's curriculum is broad and covers the range of national curriculum subjects. However, you readily acknowledge that some aspects are studied in greater depth than others. You are keen to review the curriculum. You want to ensure that it not only meets the statutory requirements, but that it addresses interests of the pupils of Harlestone and allows teachers to carefully check the progress pupils make in all subject areas.
- The school's website does not meet with statutory guidance for what schools must publish online. Some information, such as that relating to the curriculum or provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, is not detailed enough to provide parents with all the information they may require.
- Pupils' rates of attendance at Harlestone are lower than those seen nationally. While you have had some success, by working with parents, to improve their children's attendance, some pupils still do not attend school regularly enough.
- The school environment is bright and welcoming. Pupils engage well in class because teachers make the learning interesting for them. They are keen learners who enjoy a range of opportunities, such as residential trips, visits to the theatre and taking part in sporting events. Pupils told me that the best thing about the school is that 'everyone is kind, caring and we help each other'.
- You and your governors recognise that many improvements have taken place over recent years so that the pupils now receive a good standard of education. You are not complacent, however, and, ably supported by your staff, you are determined to continue in your relentless drive to improve outcomes for pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers fully embed the recent improvements to the teaching of writing, including insisting that pupils use the full range of their punctuation skills when they write across a range of subjects
- the forthcoming curriculum review enables teachers to be held to account for the progress pupils make across a range of subjects
- they work more extensively with parents whose children's attendance is stubbornly low
- the school's website meets statutory requirements and is kept up to date, so that parents can access all the information they may require.

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

Yours sincerely

Di Mullan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, three governors, including the chair of governors, and three teachers who have responsibility for the early years and the quality of teaching and learning. I spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone. I spoke with parents as they brought their children to school and considered the six responses to their online survey, Parent View. I visited all classes with you to see the learning taking place, including a trip to Brington Primary School because the Year 6 pupils were being taught at that site. I spoke with a group of pupils and looked at pupils' workbooks with you. Together, we scrutinised a range of school documentation, including that relating to the safeguarding and the progress pupils make. I also examined the school's self-evaluation document and the school's plans for improvement.