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Dear Mr Samson

Short inspection of Godalming Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 24 January 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 December 2012.

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 arrival, you have transformed the culture of the school. You have rightly won the respect of parents because of the clarity of your vision and the rapid improvement in standards you have overseen. Underpinned by the compelling values of 'live, love, learn', you have galvanised your staff to create a welcoming, nurturing community that has the achievement of all pupils at its heart.

Pupils love coming to school and wear their uniforms with pride. They are enthusiastic learners who conduct themselves extremely well in lessons and around the school. They are respectful to their teachers, considerate towards each other and polite to visitors. In lessons, teachers challenge pupils to work as hard as they can and give them interesting activities to do. Leaders make regular checks on how well pupils are doing and work with teachers to ensure that all pupils receive the help they need to achieve their potential. You have also put in place effective support so that, when necessary, pupils benefit from timely interventions to help them catch up. As a result, pupils are making strong progress in their learning across a range of subjects. Any differences between the progress of disadvantaged pupils or those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and their peers are diminishing rapidly. Parents are complimentary about the strong impact you have had on standards and appreciate all that you do for their children.

At the time of your last inspection, the inspector praised leaders and governors for ensuring that good teaching enabled pupils to achieve well in their learning. The report also noted pupils' high rates of attendance and the school's strong provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. At the same time, the inspector judged that teaching across the school was not yet consistently good and that teachers should use questioning more effectively to promote pupils' progress. You have maintained and built on these strengths and you have successfully tackled the areas for improvement. As a result, teaching across the school is consistently strong, and questioning is used to good effect. Teachers use well-targeted questions that probe pupils' knowledge and understanding and require them to explain their thinking.

You have rightly focused on ensuring that teachers receive high-quality training and that they are held to account for the progress their pupils make. Teachers value the opportunities you give them to develop. You encourage them to observe each other so that that good practice is shared throughout the school. Consequently, teachers plan well to meet the different needs of pupils in their classes. They check pupils' progress regularly, providing helpful feedback in line with the school's policy. In lessons, teachers challenge pupils to work hard and do their best. Pupils take pride in their work and tackle the activities that teachers give them with relish.

You have embarked on an ambitious programme of further improvement designed to ensure that all groups of pupils, including the most able, those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make consistently strong progress in their learning. To achieve this vision, all staff work tirelessly to further improve teaching. They are also committed to ensuring that the curriculum provides pupils with an outstanding preparation for their next steps in education and for life in modern Britain.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Pupils feel safe from bullying and are taught to keep themselves safe in school, outside school and on the internet. The school makes good provision for pupils' physical and mental well-being. For example, pupils are invited to feed any anxieties they have during the week to the 'worry monster' in their classroom. At the end of the week, in circle time, pupils have the opportunity to share their concerns: one pupil said, 'it means you can go home for the weekend without any worries.' Pupils play well together at breaktimes, and staff supervise them vigilantly. The site is secure.

All staff receive regular training in keeping pupils safe from all forms of abuse, including from radicalisation. They know how to report any concerns and they are encouraged to do so. The school has cultivated good links with the NSPCC, who have provided additional training for staff. The three designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) have received appropriate training and are diligent in carrying out their responsibilities. They always act on any concerns reported by staff. If a child protection referral is made, staff are tenacious in following it up with appropriate outside agencies, with whom they have good working relationships.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we looked closely at the progress of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Last year, pupils in Year 6 made similar progress to those nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. This was an improvement on results obtained in 2015. However, you correctly identified that a small number of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities did not make as much progress as their peers in 2016. You have made effective use of additional funding provided by the government to enhance the provision for these pupils. You also make regular checks on their progress. As a result, disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities currently in the school are catching up with their peers, particularly in Years 5 and 6. However, you acknowledge that there is still some work to do to eradicate the differences completely in all year groups.
- We also examined the role of governance in driving improvement in the school. You have forged an effective partnership with your governing body. Together, you have developed an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Governors hold you to account for pupils' progress and well-being through an effective committee structure, which includes a committee dedicated to safeguarding matters.
- The curriculum is fundamental to your vision for the school, and so we focused on this as part of the inspection. You have skilfully woven together the school's core values of 'live, love, learn' to create a broad and balanced curriculum that has British values at its heart. Pupils enjoy their learning immensely, be it singing with gusto in music or concentrating hard as they practise routines in gymnastics. Leaders ensure that the various elements of the curriculum knit together seamlessly. For example, in orienteering, pupils apply their mathematical knowledge to plot and measure a route. The taught curriculum is complemented by a range of lunchtime and after-school clubs as well as by exciting visits. Because of your determination that all pupils should have access to a rich and engaging curriculum, you are preparing them well for their next steps in education and for life in modern Britain.
- The final theme that we looked at during the inspection was attendance. Attendance overall is above the national average, but absence rates for some disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are higher than the national average for all other pupils. You have worked well with the educational welfare officer and with other schools in the area to agree a common approach to attendance. The comprehensive range of approaches you have designed is beginning to bear fruit. However, you acknowledge that progress in reducing absence rates for these pupils has been slower than you would have liked.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the rigorous approaches you have put in place to support the progress of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities enable them to catch up quickly with their peers in all year groups
- rates of attendance continue to rise for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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

Yours sincerely

Gary Holden
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, other leaders, teachers, pupils, the chair of the governing body, members of the governing body and a representative of Surrey Local Authority. We visited all classes and scrutinised a sample of pupils' work. I took into account 102 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I observed pupils' behaviour at break, lunchtime and around the school. I spoke to a number of parents at the beginning of the school day. I analysed a number of documents provided by the school, including information about pupils' progress, and records of safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness.

I focused in particular on the following aspects during the inspection: the effectiveness of the school's work to keep pupils safe; how well the school has responded to the areas for improvement from the previous inspection; the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities; the role of governors in holding leaders to account for the progress that pupils make; and the effectiveness of the curriculum in preparing pupils for their next steps and for life in modern Britain.