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Sarah Symonds
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Symonds

Short inspection of Headcorn Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 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. You were appointed to this, your first headship, in February 2016 after leading the school in an acting capacity for a year. You have created a new and strong leadership team. You lead your staff with determination and commitment. Many members of staff expressed how much they enjoyed working at the school and how proud they are to be part of the school community. A typical comment expressing the views of many staff was, 'The new leadership team has steered us with strength and clarity of vision and there is the feeling that we have so much more to give in the future and an exciting time of development ahead.' Parents also value your very effective leadership. One parent wrote, 'Miss Symonds is an excellent headteacher supported by great teachers and other staff who really care about the children.'

You have a very clear view about what the school does well and where it could do even better. You work productively in partnership with other schools and your local authority adviser. Your plans for improvement are incisive, ambitious and focused on improving pupils' outcomes even further. You and all the staff know the pupils well. Leaders track pupils' progress carefully and make sure that any additional help needed is quickly provided.

Headcorn is a caring, friendly and happy school where pupils feel valued, behave well and enjoy all that they do. Many parents commented on the positive and

supportive community ethos, the range of clubs available and the strong pastoral care for their children.

You are mindful of the issues identified as needing improvement from the last inspection as well as clearly identifying current key priorities. The school's own marking and feedback policy is consistently used by all staff and pupils said that teachers' comments help them know how to improve their work. Leaders have worked effectively to diminish the differences between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, including those who are most-able, and other pupils nationally. Challenge across the curriculum for most-able pupils, and developing pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics correctly remain priorities. Leaders must also ensure that more pupils work at greater depth in a range of subjects. Additionally, governors need to be suitably more challenging when scrutinising the work of school leaders.

The school is at an exciting stage in its development with the expansion to a two-form entry school, which begins in September with an additional class in the Reception Year. You are managing this, including the building project, very effectively and ensuring that nothing impedes the pupils' education, welfare and well-being.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Pupils' welfare and safety are paramount and there is a very strong culture of safeguarding embedded in the school. In addition to yourself as the main designated safeguarding leader, the deputy headteacher and the inclusion manager are also trained in this role. This ensures that there is always a highly effective, trained safeguarding lead available, should they have a concern.

Staff, including governors, are trained well in all aspects of safeguarding and know they are all responsible for pupils' welfare and safety. You make sure that everyone is kept informed of any new requirements. All of your policies and procedures relating to safeguarding are up to date. Records are detailed and of high quality. Leaders check carefully the suitability of any adults who work in the school and keep appropriate records of this information.

Pupils said they feel safe and well looked after in school. There are effective links with parents and external agencies so that pupils receive timely and appropriate support when required. Almost all parents who responded to the online survey, Parent View, agreed that the school keeps their children safe and that children are well looked after. One parent commented, 'Headcorn School is one big family. It offers a happy, safe environment for learning.'

You are extremely vigilant in ensuring pupils' safety during the building works. You insist that the contractors follow your procedures for safeguarding pupils to the letter, particularly to ensure safe access for pupils to the key stage 2 playground.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection we agreed to focus on the following aspects of the school's work: the progress current pupils are making across key stage 2; the achievement of the most able pupils; how well pupils' build on the good start they have in the early years; the impact of leaders' work to improve achievement in mathematics; and the effectiveness of the safeguarding procedures.
- By the end of Year 6 in 2016, too few pupils had made adequate progress overall from their starting points at the end of key stage 1. Progress in writing was stronger than reading and progress in mathematics was particularly weak. As a result, the proportion of pupils that reached the expected standard was below that found nationally and too few reached the higher standards. This was not typical of previous years and was disappointing for you.
- You, governors and senior leaders carefully investigated why this was the case and then rapidly took effective action. The pupils found the national Year 6 tests very challenging and the results did not reflect their achievement in class. You and senior leaders are ensuring that this is not the case for pupils currently in Year 6. You established the necessary actions for leaders and staff to take. The success of these is evident in the progress of pupils currently in key stage 2. Almost all pupils in Years 3 to 6, including the relatively small groups of those who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are making good progress, with an increasing proportion making more rapid gains in their learning. Achievement is clearly improving. You acknowledge, however, that there is scope to provide greater challenges for the most able pupils to reach the higher standards. In addition, you are fully aware that expectations should be even higher to ensure that more pupils from all groups are securing greater depth in their learning in all subjects as well as in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Children get off to a flying start in the Reception Year and make good progress from their starting points. Their achievement is effectively built upon in Years 1 and 2 where they continue to make rapid progress. As in key stage 2, however, you have identified that pupils in all groups should be further challenged to work at greater depth across the curriculum.
- You correctly identified pupils' achievement in mathematics as a priority and that it was mainly pupils' reasoning skills that were holding them back. You and your staff have worked very hard, and continue to do so, to improve outcomes for pupils. As one member of staff said, 'We have immersed ourselves in mathematics.' All staff have undertaken training, you have introduced a new approach to teaching mathematics and raised the status of the subject within the school and with parents. A clear and informative display in the hall exemplifies this, shows progression and how pupils can apply their mathematical skills. The impact of your initiatives is evident in current pupils' books and their improving progress. There is, however, no complacency and you acknowledge that you need to sustain the momentum of your effective work to further improve pupils' outcomes in the subject.
- Governors know the school well. They are well informed by you and their own

monitoring visits. You have a good working relationship with them and they are fully confident in what they describe as your 'inspirational leadership'. Governors' strategic decision making supports the school's key priorities, for example investment in staffing to support improvement in mathematics. In addition, governors are taking a strong lead in the building extension so that you are not detracted from your focus on the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' achievement. There has been an increasing level of challenge from governors. You would welcome further challenges, so that together you can improve the school further.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils are consistently challenged to achieve high standards
- pupils from all groups make strong and sustained progress to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding in all subjects at a greater depth
- the momentum and focus on improving pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics is sustained
- governors continue to raise the level of challenge to leaders to ensure further improvement.

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

I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the inclusion manager, the leaders for English and mathematics and a group of pupils. I also met with the chair and the vice-chair of the governing body and the local authority improvement adviser. I took into account 39 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, which included 28 written comments. I looked at the 106 responses to the pupil survey and 25 responses to the staff survey. You accompanied me on most of my visits to all of the classes. During these visits, I looked at pupils' work in their books and talked to them about their learning. I observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime and around the school. I sampled a range of documents and records, including: information about pupils' progress; leaders' and your checks on the quality of teaching and learning; the school improvement plan; and documents relating to safeguarding. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness.