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Mr Alex Moir
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Dear Mr Moir

Short inspection of Park Wood Junior 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 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.

The school is positive and welcoming. The atmosphere in lessons, in the lunch hall and around the school is purposeful and friendly. Parent and staff responses to the online surveys are overwhelmingly positive. Relationships between pupils and adults are warm and respectful. Pupils are polite and behave well. They are keen to talk about their learning and are ready for more challenge. Staff are proud to be part of the school and enjoy working here.

The previous inspection highlighted several strengths, including pupils' achievement, the quality of teaching and teaching assistant support, behaviour, an interesting curriculum, pupils' enjoyment in learning and effective leadership and management. These aspects continue to be strong. The emphasis on making the curriculum exciting and interesting has a positive impact on staff and pupils' attitudes and their

enjoyment of learning. The staff survey shows that staff feel motivated, well supported and trusted to try new ideas.

The previous inspection report recommended that the school should make more precise checks on pupils' skills and knowledge, both over time and during lessons, so that teachers include more challenging activities. The school has adopted a system for teachers to check on, and record, pupils' achievement against the national expectations. This is working well and the objectives in lessons are clear and shared with the pupils. While in some of the lessons we visited, particularly in mathematics, there were good opportunities for pupils to challenge themselves and extend their learning, this was not the case in others.

Pupils' achievement continues to be at least at, and usually just above, the national average, but you are quite rightly not content with this. Your analysis shows that the most and least able pupils do well, but you know there is more scope for your middle-ability and disadvantaged pupils to achieve even better. You are also keenly aware that there are gender differences in achievement in mathematics and in writing. You are currently implementing a sharply focused improvement plan to raise achievement, especially in writing and mathematics. Everyone understands the aims of the improvement plan and governors are checking regularly to make sure that improvements are happening. Some of the checks focus too much on what adults are doing, for example in their marking, rather than on the quality of the pupils' work. There is more to do to make sure that all pupils are given enough opportunities to write at length and to improve their handwriting.

Safeguarding is effective.

Parents and the staff overwhelmingly agree that pupils are safe, happy and well looked after in school. The vast majority of responses to the surveys and all the parents spoken to at the start of the day were highly positive. There are secure systems for checking and recording the suitability of adults before they can work with the children. Records about pupils and staff are well organised and kept securely, but easily accessed when necessary. Three senior members of staff have completed the enhanced training for designated safeguarding leaders. All staff have completed comprehensive training covering all relevant aspects of safeguarding. Governors also receive training and carry out their responsibilities rigorously. They monitor regularly to make sure systems are operating appropriately. The school maintains helpful relationships with families and external specialist services. Leaders also enhance the school provision by buying in services such as counselling and speech therapy. Leaders have good evidence to show significant measurable improvements in pupils' social and emotional development and attendance because of this provision and the ongoing support provided in the nurture hub.

Overall attendance dipped a little last year but it is now above the previous national average. Pupils are enthusiastic about the rewards systems which recognise good

attendance. Last year, the number of short-term exclusions was slightly higher than the national average, but has fallen this year.

Inspection findings

- At the start of my visit, we discussed the lines of enquiry to be considered during the day. We agreed to explore: the impact of leadership on some important aspects of school life; progress on the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection, including assessment; achievement in writing, particularly for boys and disadvantaged pupils; achievement in mathematics, especially for girls and middle-ability pupils.
- The school is a warm, welcoming place and is an important part of the community. Visitors are welcome, for example pupils suggested some thoughtful ideas for activities to entertain senior citizens who visit regularly. Leaders are responsive and highly visible around the school and at the start of each day. Changes and improvements are planned and monitored carefully by leaders, including governors. The vast majority of parents and all staff praise the pupils for their good behaviour. Relationships between pupils and adults are warm and respectful. Pupils are confident, articulate and keen to talk about their learning. They are poised and ready to take on more challenges.
- The newly developed assessment system is used to identify gaps, strengths and weaknesses for groups and individual pupils. All staff have access to this information and use it to plan next steps in learning. It is also used to identify gaps relating to vulnerable groups such as disadvantaged pupils. A group of staff has specific responsibility for keeping a close eye on the achievement of these pupils. The objectives for each lesson are specific and shared so that pupils know what good learning will look like. Staff are scrupulous in providing detailed feedback and pupils respond appropriately. There needs to be more of a focus on responding quickly during lessons and moving pupils on more quickly to greater challenges.
- Last year, there was a new method of assessing writing at the end of Year 6 and more demanding expectations. Pupils' progress in writing was judged to be lower than it should have been. Leaders believe they checked and reported the pupils' achievements very rigorously and may even have been a little too exacting. However, the pupils' books suggest that writing remains weaker than other subjects. This year, leaders have requested a full external moderation to ensure that their assessments are accurate. Teachers plan using the national curriculum requirements which are shared with pupils. Pupils reflect well on what tasks require and how well they have done, both on their own and with their peers. Books and classroom displays show interesting stimuli and purposes for different types of writing. The curriculum is planned to provide 'wow' moments and practical activities which involve and interest all pupils. As a result, some lively writing is evident in the books and on display. Examples include stories about being a secret agent and newspaper articles about Boudicca's rebellion against

the Romans. In the Year 6 books there is good evidence of pupils reflecting on their initial drafts, improving and presenting high-quality pieces of extended writing. There is also some interesting scientific writing involving explanation and reasoning. Pupils have good opportunities to discuss and form their ideas with others. When they share their ideas orally, they show they are confident, articulate and able to use a wide and interesting vocabulary. There is scope to make sure they translate this fully into their writing. In some year groups and classes, expectations about how much pupils can and should be achieving are lower than they should be. There is still a noticeable difference in the quality of boys' and girls' writing in some classes. There is a lack of a coherent and consistently implemented handwriting policy and most pupils do not use a neat, fluent writing style.

- Although last year pupils' achievement in mathematics was above the national average, leaders quite rightly believe that there is scope for all pupils, particularly girls, to achieve even better mathematically. They have changed the way mathematics is taught to ensure that all pupils receive an interesting, challenging mathematics curriculum. In the mathematics lessons visited, pupils were keen to achieve and to discuss their methods of solving problems. Several girls made a confident contribution, demonstrating their solutions to the whole class. One was particularly keen to show how one number was different from the other numbers and provided more of a challenge. The work in books suggests that pupils are achieving good progress in mathematics. A few parents expressed some concerns about the new approach to mathematics. This may reflect the fact that it is not fully embedded in all classes. The level of challenge in some of the lessons visited was a little low and there is scope to really push the learning on so that all pupils achieve more in every lesson.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- raise expectations further about how much, and what quality of work, pupils can produce, particularly in writing
- implement a consistent handwriting policy so that all pupils can use a fluent, cursive script.

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

Yours sincerely

Sheena MacDonald
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the deputy headteacher, business manager, English and mathematics leaders, an improvement adviser from the local authority and six governors. I had lunch with a group of pupils. You and I observed the quality of teaching and learning across all age groups. I also made a short visit to the nurture hub with the deputy headteacher. Throughout this time, I took the opportunity to look at the pupils' books and the work on display. I carried out a further scrutiny of writing books from across the school.

I looked at a range of the school's documentation including information about pupils' achievement and safeguarding checks, policies, and procedures. I also looked at, and discussed with you and the senior leaders, the evaluation of the school's effectiveness and the current improvement plan. I took account of 35 staff responses to the online questionnaire and 54 responses to the online survey, Parent View. I received 14 written comments from parents, and met some parents at the start of the day.