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Mrs Helen Avey  
Headteacher  
Highbury Infant School and Nursery  
Standhill Road  
Hitchin  
Hertfordshire  
SG4 9AG

Dear Mrs Avey

### **Short inspection of Highbury Infant School and Nursery**

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. Your evaluation of the school is accurate and, consequently, plans for improvement are focused and reviewed frequently to make sure that they are effective. Governors are highly skilled and knowledgeable and support the leadership team well. Governors speak with pride about the school and share your enthusiasm and desire to improve it further.

Throughout the nursery and infant school you, staff and governors have established an inclusive community in which every child is supported well and feels valued. Children in the early years make good progress because of the stimulating learning environment and well-chosen activities that help them quickly develop their skills, particularly in reading, writing and number. As they move through the infant school, pupils continue to enjoy school and achieve well. This is because the learning experiences their teachers plan for them are relevant and engaging. In 2016, the proportion of pupils who reached age-related expectations by the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics was above the national average.

Parents are very positive about the school. They appreciate the warmth and approachability of staff, and believe that their children are happy and taught well. One parent spoke for many by saying: 'Our children have always gone happily into school; this is surely a testament to this school's warm, nurturing, happy environment.' You successfully build very positive relationships with parents, who are keen to get involved with the school and support pupils' learning. During the

inspection, several parents were seen volunteering as 'number partners', playing board games with groups of pupils to improve the pupils' number skills.

The school is a calm and purposeful place in which to learn. Pupils behave exceptionally well and have very good attitudes towards their learning. One pupil told me, 'We do lots of learning here and all the teachers are really kind', and another commented, 'We have fun learning here.'

Staff enjoy working at the school and share your ambition for further improvement. They feel well supported because there are good systems in place to share ideas and plan learning activities together. Consequently, teaching across the school is effective. Pupils make good progress personally and academically and move successfully on to their next phase of learning when they leave at the end of Year 2.

You and the governors have been effective in maintaining the strengths identified in the previous inspection and addressing the areas for improvement. However, you recognise that there are still areas to develop to move the school forward and improve the educational experience for all pupils. You have already identified that the most able pupils are not provided with sufficiently challenging work in all subjects across the curriculum. As a result, the most able pupils are not consistently attaining the higher standards of which they are capable.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You and the governors have made sure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All procedures and policies are in place to ensure that safeguarding is a strength across the school. You have robust systems for the recruitment and induction of new staff. You provide all staff with the appropriate training and have developed a shared understanding that the safeguarding of pupils is everyone's responsibility. Staff follow the agreed procedures if they are concerned about any pupil. Concerns are addressed quickly and leaders liaise well with external professionals to reduce any risk of harm.

Pupils say that they feel well cared for and looked after in school. They told me that the teachers look after them well and 'everyone is nice in this school, so you feel safe'. Parents unanimously agree that their children are safe in your care. One parent commented: 'Children feel very safe at school. They have a clear idea of what is expected of them, and know that their teachers and the headteacher will support them if they are worried.'

### **Inspection findings**

- In order to check whether the school remains good, I followed a number of lines of enquiry. I considered whether the good quality of teaching has been maintained since the previous inspection.
- You have successfully developed teachers' skills so that they effectively plan learning activities that meet the needs and abilities of the pupils in their class. Teachers effectively identify the skills pupils need to acquire and consider the

progress pupils make, rather than just the activities they will complete. Pupils have more opportunity to explain what they are learning, developing their vocabulary as a result. For example, in Reception, a child wrote instructions for a recipe. The child spoke confidently, explaining that 'good instructions have bullet points with numbers so the reader knows which way they are going' and that if the reader follows the numbers in order, 'they will make some very good cakes'.

- Lessons begin with teachers explaining the purpose of the learning, the skills that pupils will acquire and what pupils need to do to achieve well. Pupils told me this information 'helps us to know what we are doing, and how to improve our work'. No learning time is lost, pupils are fully engaged throughout their lessons and they receive effective, high-quality teaching so they make good progress.
- Pupils are encouraged to be more independent. Teachers use your chosen approaches successfully so that pupils know how to reflect on their learning and also how to move on if they are stuck. Adults use these strategies consistently so that pupils engage in lessons and develop positive attitudes.
- Another area I considered was how successfully you and governors have developed the role of subject leaders. Subject leaders are knowledgeable and confident about the curriculum areas they lead. They rigorously check the quality of teaching by gathering information from a range of sources, for example observations of lessons and looking at pupils' work. This ensures that teaching and learning are judged accurately. Subject leaders provide constructive feedback to staff so that teachers are clear about how to improve their practice further. The performance management of staff is rigorous. You set precise targets for staff that closely link to the school improvement priorities so that everyone is very clear about what they need to do. As a result of the good-quality training you provide, all staff are highly skilled in meeting the needs of pupils.
- I investigated how well you and your leaders ensure that the needs of the most able pupils are being met, so that they make rapid progress and attain well. Published data for 2016 shows that the proportion of pupils attaining a greater depth in writing was above the national average, but in reading and mathematics it was below the national average. You have already identified that the most able pupils need more opportunities to think for themselves and make their own choices.
- You have introduced a range of effective support to help the most able pupils achieve well. Pupils have more opportunity to use and apply their knowledge and skills to solve problems and discuss different viewpoints. The most able pupils have been given leadership responsibilities, particularly in reading, where they effectively question and support younger pupils who are learning to read. A group of most-able pupils spoke enthusiastically about how teachers challenge them and 'help us to think and learn new things'. They also told me that they would like to 'take on new challenges' and would like tasks 'where you have to really think and use your brain to solve problems'.
- From the work in pupils' books and the school's own assessment information, evidence shows that the most able pupils are making strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics. To improve further, you accept that the most able

pupils could be better challenged by more open-ended tasks to think for themselves, and opportunities to apply learned skills across all subjects.

- Finally, I looked at rates of attendance and, specifically, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. This is because published data in 2016 shows that this group had particularly high rates of absence, including persistent absence. I scrutinised the data for this small group of pupils and it demonstrated that almost all these pupils had high rates of attendance. Only very few pupils, for more complex reasons, were regularly absent.
- The attendance of all pupils is given a high priority in the school and there is a range of appropriate measures in place to ensure that all pupils have high attendance. You and other leaders take a direct role in addressing any attendance issues. You identify any barriers and work closely with families to reduce these. As a result, the school's attendance information for the current term and academic year shows that for all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, attendance is an improving situation and no pupils are held back by low attendance.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- Teachers provide more opportunities for the most able pupils to build their resilience by making their own choices when applying their skills in all subjects across the curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Fiona Webb  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

- During the course of this inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders and subject leaders, the school secretary, the chair of the governing body and two other governors. I also spoke to a local authority officer on the telephone.
- I gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included observations of teaching and learning, jointly with you, in almost all classes and sampling of pupils' current work across all subjects and across a wide range of abilities.

- I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including your self-evaluation, the school's plans for improvement, assessment information for all year groups, documents relating to pupils' attendance and the school's pupil premium report.
- I spoke informally to a number of pupils in classrooms and met more formally with two groups of pupils chosen by you.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff and case studies about referrals made to external agencies. A discussion was held with you as the school's designated safeguarding lead.
- I took into account the 92 parent responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, the 11 letters I received from parents and the views of the parents I spoke with during the inspection. I also considered the results provided by eight staff in the staff questionnaire and two letters I received from staff.