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Dear Nicola Wood

Short inspection of Greatstone Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 February 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 May 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

In the five years since the last inspection there have been changes in staffing, including senior and middle leaders. Nevertheless, the school has a clear sense of direction and purpose that is understood and articulated by leaders, staff and governors. You have 'grown your own' by training teachers new to the profession from within the school community. The recently appointed senior leaders are already making a strong contribution and you are currently developing the skills and expertise of subject leaders.

The previous inspection highlighted good teaching, improving achievement, sharply focused leadership and strengths in behaviour, including 'superb relationships' between staff and pupils. These aspects generally remain strong. Following a dip in pupils' achievement in mathematics at the end of Year 6 last year, you have taken steps to improve the quality of teaching and learning in this subject and the changes appear to be working. Parents, staff and pupils are fulsome in their praise of all aspects of the school. The pupil and staff survey responses were very positive indeed. The school is a vibrant, happy place where pupils are keen to share their achievements. Almost all pupils say they are encouraged to be friendly and to take on responsibilities. They believe that teachers help and listen to them. Staff are proud to be a part of the school and enjoy their work. The culture and ethos of the

school are very positive and underpinned by strong, shared values.

The previous inspection report recommended that the school should improve the quality of teaching and learning in the early years, particularly in the nursery and especially for boys. You have addressed those concerns, in part, by strengthening the teaching team in the early years. As a result, the children achieve well now, although you believe that there is more scope to deepen their communication and language skills. A current focus for improvement is the achievement of boys in writing. Your early years staff are improving the quality of provision so that all children, including the boys, are more interested and involved in the wide range of activities on offer.

The last report also asked you to improve the quality of the guidance given to some pupils to help their learning, particularly those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This has been addressed but you are very aware that the achievement of some groups of pupils continues to vary. For example, you quite rightly believe that your most-able pupils and your disadvantaged pupils could achieve even more. Your work on enriching the curriculum and building in more challenge and more opportunities for pupils to make decisions about their own learning is supporting the most able to achieve well. There is more to do to really tease out why your disadvantaged pupils are not achieving as well as they could.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils feel safe, happy and well looked after in school. Parents and staff overwhelmingly agree. Most responses to all the surveys, and most of the parents who spoke to me at the start of the day, were highly positive about all aspects of the school and particularly about children's safety and welfare. There are secure systems for checking and recording the suitability of adults before they are allowed to work with the children.

Governors carry out their responsibilities and regularly monitor to check that policies and systems are being applied and used correctly. Five senior members of staff have recently completed enhanced training for designated safeguarding leaders. All other staff have also completed up-to-date training covering all relevant aspects. The systems for recording and reporting any concerns are well organised and efficient. Sensitive information is kept securely. The school maintains valuable relationships with its families and external groups such as early help and social services.

Attendance dipped last year with a few pupils missing a lot of school. Strategies to improve attendance are working and pupils are enthusiastic about the rewards systems that recognise good attendance, behaviour and how they put into practice the school's values such as tolerance and respect. Overall attendance is now at the national average although some pupils still arrive late and appear unconcerned about missing the start of the day.

Inspection findings

- At the start of my visit, we discussed the lines of enquiry to be considered during the day based on outcomes in recent years and documents I had read before the inspection. The latter included your self-evaluation and plans for the future. We agreed to explore: the impact of leadership on some important aspects of school life; the quality of provision in the early years; teaching and achievement in mathematics, particularly in key stage 2, and in writing, particularly in key stage 1; and disadvantaged and the most able pupils' attainment and progress.
- The atmosphere around the school is positive and purposeful. Staff feel motivated and well supported and are strongly committed to raising pupils' aspirations and enriching their knowledge and understanding of the wider world. Pupils also want to come to school and are keen to do well. They are polite, friendly and talk enthusiastically about their school and their achievements. Several directed my attention to displays on British values and could explain how they demonstrate the different values such as mutual respect and the rule of law. They were also keen to point out pieces of work that they were particularly proud of. The recent emphasis on making the curriculum more exciting and interesting, with opportunities for pupils to have a say in the direction of learning, is beginning to make a positive difference to pupils' attitudes and the quality of their work across different subjects. Governors and leaders are implementing a sharply focused and supportive monitoring system closely linked to the accurate priorities highlighted in the improvement plan.
- Over the past few years, children have achieved well and outcomes at the end of Reception Year have risen to above the national average. There are now no major gaps between boys' and girls' progress. Teachers plan interesting and lively activities, for example, digging in the sand for buried treasure or finding footprints on the classroom floor and having to work out who they belong to. They equally enjoyed a dinosaur egg hatching and the baby dinosaur going missing, presumed kidnapped! Children talk excitedly about these events and activities. There is a good range of activities to support writing skills, such as using chopsticks to develop fine motor skills. Boys and girls independently share and enjoy books in the Nursery and in Reception.
- All staff have received training on mathematical reasoning and making best use of new resources. The most up-to-date information suggests that most pupils are making at least reasonable progress in mathematics this year. This is supported by the work in their books that shows that they are covering a lot of ground at the right level of depth. There is strong evidence that they are being encouraged to reason, problem solve and to explain their thinking. In mathematics lessons, pupils are fully engaged and keen to achieve well. They persist even when the work is difficult. For example, an activity involving adding and subtracting fractions was very challenging but they persevered. Teachers plan activities with varying levels of difficulty and the pupils are guided to choose the level of challenge they feel ready for.
- There are some good examples of mathematics related to everyday life in mathematics lessons and in several other subjects. For example, in a key stage 2 lesson, there were interesting activities to explore the properties of triangles

around the school and, in Reception, children put in order toy vehicles with numbers and simple calculations written on them. During an enterprise project, real-life mathematics was very much in evidence – pupils were involved with a wide range of activities to make money, such as car washing and photography.

- Evidence in pupils' books and displays around the school show high-quality writing and rapid progress in every age group. The school's assessment information confirms that a high proportion of key stage 1 pupils are on track to achieve the right level for their age. Teachers use interesting stimuli to prompt writing of varying types and in different subjects. For example, Year 1 pupils have written some interesting pieces about the Arctic and in Year 4 there is some high-quality writing about global warming. Older pupils use sophisticated strategies, such as rhetorical questions, to hook their audience. Throughout the school there are generally high expectations about the quality and quantity of writing required although occasionally some adults do not model good cursive handwriting.
- Staff are very aware of which pupils form the groups that have achieved relatively less well than others in the past. Improving their performance is a key priority underpinning much of the school improvement plan. Changes to the curriculum and an increased emphasis on pupils' making decisions about the direction and the level of challenge they should tackle are beginning to work well. These approaches support and promote the learning of both disadvantaged and most-able pupils. There is evidence in books and lessons that pupils are being encouraged to move onto more challenging activities more quickly. The school has engaged an external adviser to carry out a detailed review of the allocation of additional government funds and the effectiveness of different interventions. Nonetheless, there continue to be gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and their classmates.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that groups of pupils such as disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils achieve as well as possible by:

- carrying out an incisive review of how additional government funds for disadvantaged pupils are spent and accurately evaluating the effectiveness of all intervention activities
- using additional government funds to employ strategies which are proven to be effective for disadvantaged pupils
- embedding the improvements to the curriculum and extending challenges given to all pupils to deepen their learning.

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

Sheena MacDonald
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteachers, the English team, the office assistant and five governors. I had a telephone discussion with an improvement adviser from the local authority. Two further governors and the local authority's senior improvement adviser joined us for the feedback. You and I toured the school during the day to observe the quality of teaching and learning in all classes. While we did this, we took the opportunity to look at the pupils' books and the work on display. I carried out a further scrutiny of writing and mathematics books from Years 2 and 6.

I took account of 33 staff responses and 51 pupil responses to the online questionnaires and 41 responses to the online survey Parent View. I received 17 written comments from parents, read a school survey of parents' views, and met some parents at the start of the day. I had lunch with pupils. I looked at a range of the school's documentation including information about pupils' achievements 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.