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Jessie Bruce
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Bruce

Short inspection of Cherry Tree Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 25 May 2016, 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 2011.

This school continues to be good.

You have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. The school has now doubled in size to become a two-form-entry school of choice for parents and carers. Its motto 'Learning Together, Learning for Life' and its set of clear values boost pupils' personal development and learning effectively.

This monitoring visit confirms the positive views of many parents who think that their children make good progress at the school. Almost all parents who spoke to me, or responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, would recommend the school to others. Several parents said that they found the staff 'amazing'.

With the support of your leadership team, you are determined to ensure that pupils do their very best. You have high expectations of staff and pupils and, consequently, pupils make good progress. Your leadership is particularly effective in:

- ensuring equality of opportunity for all pupils regardless of their specific needs or backgrounds
- evaluating the quality of teaching accurately to make sure that learning is the best it can be
- helping families who are facing particular challenges in their lives, for example those who have recently moved to the area and those whose children find it hard to settle in class

- managing the school's growth and building programme very efficiently in partnership with the local authority.

With the high commitment of staff, you are maintaining the strengths of the school and addressing weaknesses promptly to make it an even better place where pupils want to learn. Further work is required to improve writing skills and to check that the most able disadvantaged pupils are achieving as highly as their peers. You are open to external reviews, work well with senior leaders and appreciate the commitment of governors, who use their expertise effectively to hold the school to account and plan for further improvement.

In their responses to the online questionnaire almost all pupils said that they enjoy their learning and that staff are helpful and friendly. The Year 6 pupils are attentive and confident to move on to their new secondary school. I saw some good learning in all years because teachers make the lessons interesting and, as a result, pupils listen well and try their very best, for example in the early years foundation stage and in science, art and Spanish. Teaching assistants make sure that pupils with additional needs are well supported in their learning and personal development.

Teachers apply the school's assessment and marking policy consistently. There are good examples of pupils improving their work as a result. You analysed in detail why, in 2015, some pupils did not make the progress expected of them at key stage 2. You identified that pupils' writing, particularly for disadvantaged boys, was not good enough. Writing is now a key priority of your development plan. You are developing a love of reading across all year groups and staff are carefully checking that their planning meets pupils' needs and abilities. Current pupils are doing well against their starting points. With your experienced deputy headteacher, you are now developing the role of subject leaders to improve learning and assessment across subjects of the curriculum. It is too early to see the full impact of this work.

You addressed the areas identified in need of further improvement at your previous inspection very well. Provision in the Nursery and Reception classes has been transformed. The whole area is an exciting and safe place where children quickly develop their social and physical skills. Over the past few years, the growth of the school has required sensitive handling. You have been instrumental in bringing families together so as to create a harmonious school community. Pupils have a good understanding of the many traditions, faiths and cultures of those who live in the local area.

You are working relentlessly to improve attendance because it is currently below the national average. Your office staff check pupils' absence and punctuality promptly. Persistent absence and lateness are reducing but, despite your efforts, more work is required to ensure that pupils' learning is not affected. An increasing number of pupils have emotional needs. You are rightly deploying a senior member of staff to ensure that welfare and attendance issues affecting some pupils are addressed quickly.

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that safeguarding and child protection arrangements keep pupils safe. Staff and governors have relevant and up-to-date training. Pupils say that they feel safe when they are at school. They are confident to speak to their teacher if they are worried about anything. Bullying is not tolerated. Records show that prompt action is taken following incidents.

A very small number of pupils who completed the Ofsted online pupil survey for this inspection said that they did not feel safe at the school and that behaviour was not good. I found that staff are vigilant, and supervision at break and lunchtime is well organised. I saw pupils behaving very well in lessons and during playtime.

The school's values play an important role in reinforcing good personal development and high standards of care. Many parents said that you are approachable and highly visible around the school, usually welcoming pupils to school in the morning. You deal with sensitive matters well and have established good links with external agencies to secure effective support for families who need help.

Inspection findings

- You have maintained a positive ethos and strong teamwork during the expansion of the school. The appointment of additional staff, and changes to teachers' deployment, have been managed smoothly to consolidate the good standards of teaching, learning and behaviour.
- The effectiveness of your leadership is particularly visible in the way you and your staff understand the varied and changing needs of the school's local community. You are working relentlessly to communicate well with parents and make your school an inclusive place where pupils learn well and develop as mature and confident young people.
- Your development plan is fit for purpose. You use it well, with governors, to review progress made against your key priorities. Governors have drafted a useful strategic plan to help them check progress. Minutes of meetings show that they do not shy away from strong challenge where it is needed.
- You and your staff know exactly what to do to improve pupils' rate of progress. You know the reasons why some Year 6 pupils who took the national test in 2015 did not make sufficient progress at key stage 2. Staff are taking action and raising their expectation. Developing pupils' writing skills and passion for reading are given a high priority. Current work shows that pupils are given more opportunities to read for pleasure and to improve their writing not only in English, but also in a range of subjects such as in their topic work.
- With the welcomed support of the local authority adviser, teachers are developing their expertise in mathematics. They are applying what they have learned to make sure that pupils grasp new concepts well before moving on. Pupils are developing and applying their problem-solving skills in other subjects such as science and computing.
- You ensure that staff check their assessment and match work closely to the ability and needs of current pupils. You meet teachers to review pupils'

progress and agree additional support where it is needed. This works well for pupils who have additional learning needs. The support and targets for disadvantaged pupils who are most able should be more precise to accelerate their progress in all years and to increase the proportion of pupils making more than expected progress.

- Children enter the early years foundation stage with levels that are below, and for some well below, those expected at that age, particularly in communication and language. Numeracy and literacy skills are practised from a very young age to improve the proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year. This is currently just below the national average and below the average for Hertfordshire.
- Children make good progress from their starting points and some need a bit more time to gain in confidence and develop their skills. They do this well as they move into Year 1 and, in 2015, the proportion of Year 1 pupils that met the expected standard in phonics was above the national figure. Considering the low levels on entry into Nursery or Reception, this represents good achievement. Older pupils make good progress because they respond positively to staff's high expectations for learning in class.
- Many pupils attend school regularly but a small number are too often absent or late. Some pupils are facing challenges in their lives that lead to emotional and behavioural difficulties at school. Despite being well managed by staff, these issues are having a negative impact on pupils' learning and achievement. The planned appointment of a senior leader is seeking to increase the school's capacity to support pupils and families in need.
- As a local leader of education you have the expertise to train, mentor and develop staff members' effectiveness. The deputy headteacher is complementing your own style of leadership very well. With the support of other senior leaders, you encourage staff to share good practice so that the new curriculum is implemented effectively. The external support from the local authority advisers is valued, particularly in moderating assessment with other schools to gain an accurate view of pupils' achievement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- increase the proportion of pupils making more than expected progress by improving the quality of writing further and setting clear targets for the most able disadvantaged pupils
- identify very clearly the responsibilities of the newly deployed senior pastoral leader to improve attendance and intervene promptly when pupils experience challenges in their lives.

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

Marianick Ellender-Gelé
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and governors. I spoke to a local authority representative. I met parents before the school day. I visited all classes and checked your evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning. I looked at pupils' work and spoke to them about their learning. I analysed recent assessment information about pupils' progress. I reviewed procedures for keeping pupils safe and checked attendance records. I considered the views of 79 parents from Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and took account of 17 additional comments from parents. I analysed questionnaire responses from 28 pupils and 35 members of staff.