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Mrs Wendy Horden
Headteacher
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Scotch Orchard
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Dear Mrs Horden

Short inspection of Scotch Orchard Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 January 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 February 2011.

This school continues to be good.

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

You and your staff team are always looking forward and are ambitious for pupils to thrive and succeed. The culture of the school values all pupils and their families. The vast majority of parents express satisfaction with the school and what it offers their children. Together with an ambitious and very competent governing body, you successfully promote the core values of the school. These values encourage academic achievement for pupils of all abilities and successfully foster pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. One parent reflected the views of nearly all of those responding to Parent View, as well as parents who spoke with me, when stating that her child 'is doing very well and is flourishing'.

You constantly reflect on the best way to teach and improve pupils' achievement. Leaders and staff are effectively adopting new ways of tracking pupils' progress using the revised National Curriculum assessments without levels. This information is accurate and accessible to leaders, governors and teachers, and is helping them to monitor how well pupils are doing. You and your senior staff have already put in place better ways to teach mathematics by making sure that most-able pupils do not fall short of their expected attainment targets.

You and the governors have managed very well the many staff changes in recent years. Newly qualified teachers and other newly appointed staff and managers have been well supported. Staff training and professional development programmes are well devised and effective. You and your deputy headteacher have been successful in making sure that changes to staffing have not disrupted pupils' learning. Teachers usually offer the right level of challenge for pupils of all abilities. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection in 2011 as inspectors identified that some teachers were not, at that time, providing pupils with work that matched their abilities.

The provision and support provided for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are very effective, and especially for pupils with education, health and care plans. Parents are very pleased and pay tribute to your teachers and support staff as, rightly, they believe that children with additional needs make exceptional progress. Pupils with additional learning needs, as well as some with acute cognitive or physical needs, receive effective support and resources in lessons. Pupils with additional needs are fully included in a school that promotes equality of opportunity in a safe, secure and positive climate for learning and socialising.

You and your staff plan a varied and stimulating curriculum that energises and interests pupils. The school has maintained its strong reputation for achieving musical excellence and high achievement in the creative arts and sport. There have been significant improvements to early years provision with more continuous provision and stronger links between the part-time (mornings) Nursery provision for three-year-olds and the Reception class for four- and five-year-olds.

Pupils throughout the school are effectively taught British values of respect for democracy. Pupils' work is attractively displayed in all areas and classrooms, demonstrating that pupils are proud of their efforts and their school. Pupils are taught the important core value of tolerance towards all of the world's major faiths, cultures and customs. This enables pupils to mature and thrive in a modern multi-cultural and diverse Britain.

Your leadership and that of your governors are effective. You make sure that the teaching is monitored regularly and systematically, although evaluations of the quality of teaching are not always as sharp as they should be. For example, it is not always clear to teachers what is relatively weak in their classroom practice, to make sure that the next time they are monitored they can build on these observations to sustain improvements to their teaching. Nonetheless, senior and middle leaders work closely with governors, particularly the standards committee, to make sure that pupils' achievement is monitored and is accurate. The teaching continues to improve in all classes and the deputy headteacher is very proactive in helping newly qualified teachers to improve their practice through close support and monitoring.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff vetting is robust and up to date for all staff, visitors, volunteers and governors. There are coherent and effective systems in place to keep pupils safe. Teaching, support and administrative staff are well trained and vigilant. Administrative staff check and verify the identity of visitors, including inspectors, when they arrive at school. Governors and staff keep up to date with legal requirements and undertake regular reviews of the school's procedures. The parents spoken to by Her Majesty's Inspector were unanimous in their belief that pupils are safe in school. Pupils say that the staff and other pupils make them feel safe and secure in school.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and staff value pupils' work and contributions. Teachers make sure that pupils are usually offered the right level of challenge in most lessons, although there are occasions when pupils are stuck on work that is too difficult, or go through too many tasks that are too easy before moving on to harder work. In Key Stage 1, for example, pupils sometimes complete too many worksheets, leaving less scope for them to write freely in English lessons or set out their own calculations in mathematics.
- Despite the disappointing national test results for Year 6 pupils last year, achievement has recovered. More pupils this year compared with last year are on track in Year 6 and other Key Stage 2 classes to reach or exceed age-related standards in reading, writing and mathematics. The mathematics leader and staff have already put in place strategies to improve achievement in mathematics. In the lessons observed with you and your deputy headteacher, and as seen in pupils' workbooks, improvements to teaching are already having an impact with early signs that achievement in mathematics is much better than the previous year's national test results. In addition, lessons are increasingly providing more problem-solving tasks for pupils to work through, but these do not always include enough opportunities for pupils to apply logical thinking in order to demonstrate their understanding of new concepts and skills. More challenging and varied problem-solving tasks are being provided that are more closely matched to the abilities of pupils, although some tasks do not always help pupils to think logically or apply their number skills as some pupils rely too much on using trial and error to solve puzzles or problems. Teachers do not always ask the right questions in some mathematics lessons to identify where gaps in pupils' learning exist. Pupils' mental arithmetic skills across the school are very secure and this aspect of mathematics is very well taught.
- Pupils try hard at their work and respond very positively with excellent behaviour and positive engagement in lessons. Pupils benefit from the extensive range of creative and performing arts, reflecting the school's strong reputation for achieving musical excellence, as well as the many sporting activities and educational visits provided by the school.

- The welfare, care and support offered to disabled pupils or those with special educational needs are of a high standard. The school is very inclusive as vulnerable pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, have access to the full range of the school's academic and creative curriculum, including music and the performing arts, and sporting activities.
- Improvements to the early years, both for Nursery and Reception children, have maintained good-quality provision. The planning adopted by teachers in both settings incorporates continuous provision through Nursery and Reception, and strong transition arrangements when Reception children move into Year 1. The teaching of phonics (letters and sounds) is very effective. The vast majority of pupils in Years 1 and 2 reach or exceed age-related levels in the national phonics screening tests. Children in the early years are provided with stimulating and varied indoor and outdoor activities. Outdoor areas and resources are of high quality and are secure, safe and stimulating for young children.
- Assessment information is accessible to staff and governors and provides accurate details of the progress pupils make and what they are expected to achieve at each key stage. Gaps are narrowing and closing rapidly between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and others in the school and nationally. Pupils are doing very well in reading and writing. The school has a very stimulating and well-resourced library which enhances and fosters a love of reading. Many of the youngest pupils (Key Stage 1) arriving at school in the morning proudly shared with me the contents of their reading bags. They are very proud of their achievements and look forward to collecting another set of books to read at home.
- Governors are knowledgeable and receive regular updates and accurate reports on the quality of teaching and learning. The headteacher and deputy headteacher monitor lessons and provide accurate evaluations of the quality of teaching. Senior leaders are good at supporting and engaging with teachers and support staff, and provide useful advice on what is working well in lessons. Nonetheless, there is room for improvement. The guidance being offered to teachers and support staff is not always critical enough to make sure that relative weaknesses are identified and addressed so that teaching focuses more on improving pupils' achievement.
- Leaders, governors and staff plan and offer pupils an extensive range of opportunities to experience and excel in music and the performing and creative arts. Pupils are taught to speak French and take part in a range of sports and crafts, including outdoor pursuits during educational visits. There are very close links with the local community and parents. In addition, there are effective and increasing links and partnerships forged by leaders, staff and governors with other schools, academies and cooperative trusts that enable staff to see and share best practice.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- ensure that there is a continued focus on sustaining improvements to pupils' achievement in mathematics across the school; and provide more opportunities for pupils to apply their reasoning skills logically to solve puzzles, number problems and tasks involving shapes, space and measures in order to raise standards still further in mathematics
- ensure that teachers receive more specific guidance on the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching to sustain good or better teaching; and make sure that this guidance focuses on improving the impact of teaching on pupils' achievement.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Staffordshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

In addition to meeting with you, your deputy headteacher and two governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, you, your deputy headteacher and I visited most classes and the early years. I spoke to a number of parents at the start of the school day to seek their views about the school. I spoke to a number of pupils during lessons and looked at some of their work in books. I also met the mathematics leader with you and your deputy headteacher to observe a group of pupils from Key Stage 2 discussing their progress in mathematics and undertaking a problem-solving task. I also considered the views of 69 parents and carers recorded on Parent View, the online Ofsted questionnaire. I looked at assessment information and the standards pupils have reached so far this year. I spoke by telephone with one of the local authority school improvement advisers. I scrutinised and discussed the school's self-evaluation and development plan, and checked staff vetting and safeguarding procedures to determine whether the school's arrangements for safeguarding are effective.