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Mr Stuart Gawthorpe
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Gawthorpe

Short inspection of Bethersden Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 2018, 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

You have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Together with governors, you have worked hard to bring stability to the school after a period of considerable change in both staffing and leadership. Within a short period, you accurately identified the areas across the school that needed to improve and implemented a number of successful strategies to address these. Consequently, the quality of teaching and learning across the school is good and improving, along with pupils' outcomes.

Pupils enjoy school and are enthusiastic about their learning. Plentiful opportunities for pupils to study different cultures and historical contexts are available across the curriculum and these help to prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain. Pupils appreciate these opportunities and speak with confidence when discussing some of the key similarities and differences between various historical periods. Pupils are rightly proud of their comparison work on the Anglo Saxons and Ancient Mayans, which illustrates their good understanding of the topics.

You work effectively with a knowledgeable and committed governing body. Although the recruitment for a substantive headteacher took longer than governors had initially hoped, they were determined to make sure that any appointment to the role was in the best interests of the pupils and the local community. Governors work hard to ensure that leaders receive helpful support and robust challenge in all aspects of the school's performance. For example, governors have challenged leaders on the impact and use of additional funding. Consequently, governors have

an accurate understanding of the use of additional funding and the impact that this is having on pupils' outcomes.

The majority of parents and carers are very happy with the school, praising your hard work, openness and commitment to their children. Parents value the small, friendly and caring ethos of the school. They describe it as a welcoming and positive environment where every child is encouraged to 'be the best that they can be'.

Staff are incredibly proud to be a part of the school and have confidence in your leadership. They feel well supported by leaders and that their professional development is valued. Staff are proactive in strengthening links between the school and the surrounding community. Pupils have a number of opportunities to work with the local church and other community organisations. This is having a positive impact on pupils' well-being and social development, as well as increasing the impact that the school is having on the wider community.

At the time of the school's previous inspection, inspectors asked leaders to improve the quality of teaching across the school by making sure that pupils receive challenge in their learning. Inspectors also required leaders to embed the school's approach to learning in reading and writing across the wider curriculum. Pupils now receive regular challenge through the effective use of the school's 'red hot challenge' initiative. As a result, pupils are making increasingly good progress, particularly in English and mathematics. Leaders have also worked hard to ensure that the standard of work seen in reading and writing is evident across the curriculum.

You have rightly recognised the need to develop further the use of assessment in teachers' planning so that all pupils consistently make at least good progress from their starting points.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records of the assurances taken to check on the suitability of staff are efficient and managed well. Staff receive training on how to keep pupils safe from abuse and the sways of radicalisation and extremism. You, your deputy designated safeguarding lead and the family liaison officer work closely together with families and external agencies to support the most vulnerable pupils. Because of this, pupils feel safe and are safe.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we agreed to look at: the effectiveness of safeguarding; the impact of leaders' strategies to improve pupils' attendance; how leaders are ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning in phonics and mathematics is leading to improved outcomes for pupils; and how effectively leaders and governors communicate with parents.

- Attendance is a high priority for leaders and governors. The robust tracking of pupils' absence ensures that pupils are safe when they are not in school. Newly introduced strategies to improve attendance are having a positive impact and there are marked improvements in the attendance of pupils who have had previously high levels of absence. However, despite this improvement, attendance is still below the national average for primary schools.
- You have taken a series of initiatives to improve the quality of teaching in phonics. For example, you have made changes to the structure of daily phonics sessions and increased training for staff. As a result, pupils' outcomes in phonics are improving rapidly.
- Teachers' timely and effective interventions to support those pupils who did not reach the required standard in phonics at the end of Year 1 are supporting pupils to catch up in Year 2.
- Pupils use a variety of mathematical vocabulary accurately in their work and most pupils make good progress in their problem-solving skills. This is because of the plentiful opportunities that pupils have to apply mathematics across the curriculum. Most pupils use manipulatives in mathematics effectively and these help them to consolidate the basic concepts that underlie the topics they are learning.
- Leaders identify that the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics needs to improve. A well-thought-through training plan is in place to develop teachers' subject knowledge. However, teachers' planning in mathematics does not consistently meet the needs of individual pupils. Consequently, not all pupils make the progress of which they are capable in the subject.
- Communication between home and school is a strength. Parents spoken to and those that responded to Ofsted's online survey feel that the school manages any concerns that they have well. Parents value the opportunity to meet with the chair of governors in the mornings and are confident to voice their concerns to her, should they have any. Helpfully, the school provides information for parents to use when supporting their child with phonics at home. Parents appreciate this.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- recent improvements to the quality of teaching in mathematics continue so that all pupils make the progress of which they are capable
- attendance continues to improve so that it is at least in line with the national average.

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

Emma Sanderson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and your team at the start of the day. We discussed your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and agreed the key areas I would focus on during the inspection. During the day, I held further discussions with you and your deputy designated safeguarding lead. I met with the chair and three other members of the governing body. I observed learning and scrutinised pupils' work with you in a number of lessons. I took account of 10 staff survey responses and 40 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I spoke with parents before school and with staff and pupils throughout the day. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including that on leaders' checks on pupils' progress, the quality of teaching and learning, and safeguarding policies and procedures. A discussion was held with one of the local authority improvement advisers linked to the school.