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Mr P Hicks
Headteacher
Heron Hill Primary School
Hayfell Avenue
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Dear Mr Hicks

Short inspection of Heron Hill Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 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 July 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You lead with passion and commitment, creating an ambitious and forward-thinking culture within school. You work effectively with a strong leadership team to ensure that the views and interests of pupils are considered when providing learning opportunities. Your combined efforts have been successful in raising standards.

Your governing body is experienced and dedicated. It offers you effective support. Governors are equally ambitious for the school and have a very clear understanding of the strategic role they play. They know the school well and share the commitment of you and your staff to provide a broad, balanced and engaging curriculum.

The pupils I spoke to are very proud of their school and are particularly grateful for the range of extra-curricular activities that are provided for them. They spoke with particular enthusiasm about the 'Bee Team' and are excited to have a beehive in the school grounds. The chair of governors, who runs this club, is justly proud of the fact that, in caring for the bees, wider community links have been developed. Most notably, strong bonds have been created between the older and younger generations.

Inspectors reported in the previous inspection that pupils' achievement should be raised further. Leaders and teachers have addressed this issue in an effective manner. Teachers use assessment precisely to track pupils' progress and ensure that lessons are suitably challenging. Leaders and teachers have undertaken a

broad range of training and have introduced new and effective resources. As a consequence, there has been considerable improvement in the level of pupils' achievement. The school's most recent performance information shows that all groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, achieved at levels which were higher than those seen nationally, both at the expected and the higher levels in the key stage 2 national tests. Progress in reading for pupils leaving Year 6 in 2017 was strong.

The previous inspector also noted that there was a need for leaders and governors to evaluate the effectiveness of school improvement plans. You have restructured key positions in your leadership team and have appointed new governors, including a new chair of governors. The leadership team and governors are working in a very effective manner and have clear targets for school improvement which are agreed and understood by all.

We discussed areas where further work is required to support school improvement. You are rightly proud of the fact that pupils overall achieve levels at the end of key stage 2 which are higher than those seen nationally. However, you are aware that the middle-ability pupils in key stage 1 are not making the same strong progress at the higher levels in reading and mathematics. Additionally, you and your leaders are aware that further methods of engaging with parents and carers need to be explored. This should ensure that information provided by the school enables parents to become more effective partners in their children's learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team ensures that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Your school site is safe and secure. Vigilant staff make sure that the identity of visitors is closely checked on entry to the school. Fire procedures are explained to visitors, and leaflets outlining the school's safeguarding procedures are freely available and well displayed in the school's entrance area.

Governors and staff complete regular safeguarding training and are very clear on their responsibilities to keep pupils safe. All parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, agree that their children feel safe at school. A typical comment was, 'My children are well cared for and feel safe.'

All members of staff place great emphasis on the mental health of pupils and create opportunities to enhance well-being. For example, a gardening club offers pupils the chance to work in an outdoor environment. Most recently, pupils created a special garden. They worked with members of their local community to design and build a trellis archway, plant bulbs and arrange climbing plants. As a consequence, they received a regional award, and their garden was opened by the mayor. The teacher who runs this club noted that, in this environment, 'Quiet children bloom'.

Inspection findings

- At the start of this inspection I shared a number of key lines of enquiry. The first considered children's progress in the early years. Your data indicates that the majority of children enter the Reception classes lacking the skills needed to begin

their learning in an effective manner. Your teachers are successful in providing a rich and varied curriculum which offers children the chance to learn effectively both indoors and outside. A new assessment system has also enabled staff to check the progress of all children. As a consequence, by the time the children leave Reception, they make good progress. The proportion of children who achieve a good level of development is broadly in line with that seen nationally. However, leaders are aware that current strategies used to engage parents in the learning process are not fully successful, as parents' responses to activities are often low.

- The next area we looked at was the progress in reading of the middle-ability pupils in key stage 1. Leaders and teachers work hard to ensure that pupils make good progress from their starting points. You are aware, however, that the number of middle-ability pupils in key stage 1 reaching the higher levels in reading is lower than that seen nationally. Leaders are working hard to address this issue. A reading action plan has been implemented to ensure that there is a clear and focused strategy to develop pupils' learning. Additional reading activities and a reading club are available to pupils. Leaders ensure that a well-stocked library is used effectively to develop reading skills further. As a consequence, pupils demonstrate great enthusiasm for reading and can talk, with confidence, about a range of high-quality texts. Teachers use challenging resources to inspire and motivate pupils to read and set clear targets for success in each lesson. For example, in a Year 1 lesson, pupils were very excited to read and discover information about whales. Pupils know their targets and how to achieve them. An analysis of pupils' work in books shows that progress is being made in reading. However, further work is required to ensure that a greater proportion of middle-ability readers reach the higher levels in future.
- You are also aware that a lower-than-average number of middle-ability pupils in key stage 1 reach the higher levels in mathematics. You have acted decisively to address this issue. Your mathematics leader works closely with other schools and shares best practice with teachers in your school. You have purchased new resources and give pupils many opportunities to take part in activities. This further develops their mathematical reasoning skills. The mathematics leader runs a 'Wednesday workshop' for teachers where their skills can be further developed. Your assessment systems are thorough and allow you to identify and offer targeted support to pupils who require additional help. As a consequence of this focused approach, leaders note marked improvement in pupils' progress and improved quality of work in pupils' books. Nevertheless, the school's most recent performance information shows that further work is required to ensure that a larger proportion of middle-ability pupils reach the higher levels in mathematics by the end of key stage 1.
- Leaders, including members of the governing body, place great emphasis on providing learning opportunities which link to the pupils' own interests. You said that, 'It is all about learning opportunities furthering children's development.' For example, pupils asked for a quiet area in the playground to sit. This has been provided for them. You also set up a pony club, at the request of pupils, to provide opportunities to learn about caring for animals. You begin each topic with an exciting event. For example, when studying Mayan history, pupils in Year 4

went into the woods to have a Mayan feast. The pupils created their own headdresses, built fires and cooked food over a fire pit. One noted, 'I really enjoyed the Mayan feast and loved being outside.' Pupils are enthusiastic about their learning and make good progress as a result.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- middle-ability pupils in key stage 1 receive the challenge they need to make stronger progress in reading and mathematics
- school staff develop further partnerships with parents to enable them to become more effective partners in their children's 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 Cumbria. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Gill Pritchard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher. I also met with seven governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke with subject leaders, your school's local authority general adviser and a teacher responsible for the after-school gardening club. I had a formal discussion with a group of pupils and met with members of staff.

Accompanied by you and the deputy headteacher, I visited all year groups in the school to observe pupils' learning. I observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and as they moved around the school. I scrutinised examples of pupils' work with your deputy and assistant headteachers. I reviewed a number of documents, including your record of checks on the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children, the school's self-evaluation form, improvement plan, assessment information and behaviour log. I also took account of the 178 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, 131 responses from the pupil survey and 28 responses from the staff survey. I considered information posted on the school's website.