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Mr Desmond Taylor
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Taylor

Short inspection of Chambersbury Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 March 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 March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

As headteacher, you have sustained high-quality leadership, which is further supported by the strong leadership of your assistant headteacher and special educational needs coordinator. This is based on your high expectations for pupils and all those working in the school to teach and support them well. Pupils and their families are central to the school's vision and ethos and, as one parent said, 'the school goes the extra mile' to meet their children's needs. You expect a high level of commitment to your pupils from everyone. Leaders carefully reflect and draw on research before making decisions, and this is used well in future planning.

Some children start in the early years foundation stage with a range of skills below those typically found, particularly in language and communication. Despite this, as a result of the exciting and stimulating learning environment, by the end of their time in the early years, children are well prepared for the next stage of their learning. You make sure that a wide variety of learning opportunities and experiences are offered. This includes each child visiting a farm and a zoo to broaden the experiences of those who have not travelled widely. Parents of young children are confident to come into school. As one said, 'There is an open-door policy.' Another parent explained how she valued the 'very good interaction between parents and teachers'.

As well as creating a nurturing environment, you have high expectations of what pupils can achieve throughout the school. You have set up comprehensive monitoring of the progress pupils make in their learning, but you always consider how you can improve the school's knowledge of its pupils. For example, you have recently introduced a system designed to help teachers to discover small gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills.

Pupils are very proud of their school and they want to learn well. They model positive behaviours for learning and know that there is a time for learning and a time for playing. Pupils are confident and trustful with adults. They behave well in school. The learning environment inside and outside is bright and thought-provoking, and encourages pupils to take pride in their learning. A wide range of before- and after-school activities are available, which are taken up by the majority of pupils.

Where pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities or are from disadvantaged backgrounds, you make sure that staff have a secure and detailed understanding of them as individuals. For example, the parent of a young child who has special educational needs feels that the class teacher has 'a meticulous understanding' of her child, and as a result the child 'is happy, making very good progress and is confident'. You champion pupils' needs and are not afraid to challenge if you feel that the response of outside agencies is not quick or significant enough. Another parent shared that when one of her children recently transferred to secondary school, she was successful because of 'what she had learned at Chambersbury Primary'.

Support for families is a strength of your school and you have been influential in the lives of some of them at times when they were having difficulties. You signpost parents to a wide range of support, such as financial advice, and by so doing help their children to be in the right frame of mind to learn well. For example, a parent said that 'the headteacher has been a major influence in my life' and that he 'made it easier'. Parents report that they have confidence in the school and that their children are safe and happy in school.

You are a resilient leader, who has worked carefully with the senior leaders and governors to provide a stable staff, despite high staff turnover in recent years. You seek to develop middle leaders and those who are relatively new to teaching through comprehensive induction, training and mentoring. You need to further develop middle leaders, so that they take increased responsibility for outcomes in their subject areas across the school. Governors share your ambition for the school and its pupils. They are better able to offer challenge and support to you since working groups were set up, which include what the chair of the governing body describes as 'experts in that area of responsibility'.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils and parents agree that Chambersbury Primary School is a safe place in which to learn. You, your staff and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements and that your safeguarding procedures are well understood by pupils, parents and staff.

Pupils say that they feel safe and are confident to speak with an adult in school if they have any worries. They are encouraged to talk openly about safeguarding and value the weekly safeguarding message in school assemblies, where at the end they are all reminded by saying 'be safe' together. Pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of how to stay safe when using the internet in school and at home. They are confident in knowing what to do if someone unknown tries to make contact with them online.

Pupils know what bullying is, and teaching about accepting and listening to others is central to the school's curriculum. Pupils say that the school is 'like a family'. Supporting pupils' families is central to the school's ethos and parents talk about how the school 'goes the extra mile' to help them at times of anxiety.

Staff are trained in relevant aspects of safeguarding, including the government's 'Prevent' duty. They know what action to take if they have concerns about the well-being of a child and all staff actively contribute to safeguarding. All the adults who completed the staff survey expressed confidence that pupils are safe in school.

Leaders, including governors, ensure that appropriate checks are carried out on adults working at the school. Records, including those of the actions leaders take when a child is vulnerable or in need of additional support, are securely held and well maintained.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain that the school remains good, I checked that all pupils were making good progress in their early learning of reading using phonics. You have successfully focused on supporting pupils as they begin to read by increasing the number of staff in classes and by buying a wide range of resources. Pupils who do not receive as much support at home as others are making better progress by being given opportunities to read at the beginning of the school day with parent volunteers. Where pupils are not learning as quickly as you would expect, you carefully identify the barriers to learning and plan appropriately to remove these. This includes afternoon lessons to boost phonics knowledge. You recognise that some pupils enter the school with low levels of speech and communication and you provide appropriate opportunities for language learning, particularly for pupils who have special educational needs. Monitoring by senior leaders has shown that staff have put training on teaching phonics into practice. Pupils are now progressing well in learning phonics.

- I explored how well pupils from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are learning in English and mathematics. As with phonics, the school has focused on early intervention. Senior leaders are highly reflective about what will help your pupils to learn best, and they have used research and their extensive knowledge of individual pupils well to set up the right support. This includes online learning for use at home, which can be monitored in school. Regular tracking of individuals' learning outcomes, analysis of gaps in their knowledge and skills, and discussion about their progress result in teachers planning effectively to bridge the gaps. However, you have not considered the relative impact and value for money of different forms of support enough. There is effective support where disadvantaged pupils also have special educational needs. Senior leaders have high expectations of staff and will not accept lack of challenge in learning. The majority of disadvantaged pupils are catching up in English and mathematics and there is robust planning for any who are not.
- I considered how well your most able pupils were being challenged to learn at a higher level in English and mathematics. You use your school monitoring systems well to identify pupils who may be able to reach higher levels in particular areas of learning. You effectively train and mentor staff on how to plan lessons which challenge all pupils by using activities at different levels of difficulty. Not all teachers consistently challenge the most able, but staff are held to account for the progress of most-able pupils in their learning and you will not accept underperformance. Pupils are supported to feel confident about making mistakes and to take risks in their learning when the level of challenge is high. In mathematics, you have rightly identified that you need to develop pupils' use of reasoning and problem solving. In English you have developed the use of open-ended questioning successfully, and you are encouraging pupils to be confident to use their imagination while at the same time writing grammatically sound English. I have concluded that all the most able pupils are currently being challenged well in their learning in English and mathematics.
- While overall attendance was in line with the national average in 2016, this was not the case for disadvantaged pupils and those who had special educational needs and/or disabilities. Hence, I followed up what you were doing to improve attendance for these groups. You are determined to increase attendance and you have put a wide range of strategies in place to do so. These include rewarding good attendance with stickers and a weekly house trophy, which gives the class additional use of computer games, and regularly informing parents about attendance through the weekly newsletter. You have taken appropriate legal action over unauthorised absence in the past, but you have evaluated that you are more effective when you work supportively alongside families in difficulties. Some of your pupils have legitimate reasons why they have to miss school, but you vigilantly support families to make sure that their children are able to be in school as much as possible. As a result of your support, there has been an improvement in the attendance of most of your disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Consequently, attendance has increased overall.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the impact of different interventions supported by pupil premium funding and the value for money they offer are even more closely monitored
- middle leaders take a stronger lead in developing the quality of teaching and learning in their subject areas
- the level of challenge for the most able pupils is as well targeted and planned in all classes as where practice is strongest.

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

Linda Bartlett
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I held meetings with you, your assistant headteacher, other senior and middle leaders, your office manager and the chair of your governing body. I met a group of 13 pupils chosen by you and I also spoke with pupils informally in classrooms and when walking around the school. Together with you, we visited each class to observe pupils as they were learning and to undertake a scrutiny of pupils' work in their books and folders.

I examined the policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils and the school's record of recruitment checks carried out on staff working at the school. I also analysed or discussed key documents. These included the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning; information about pupils' achievement, behaviour and attendance; records of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; and minutes of the governing body.

I considered the views of 24 members of staff and 101 pupils in response to Ofsted's surveys. I also took account of 30 responses on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 18 parents who made contact via the Parent View free-text facility. In addition, I took account of the comments of eight parents who spoke with me during the course of the inspection, as well as the school's own pupil and parent surveys.