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Miss Ceranne Litton
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Dear Miss Litton

Short inspection of Grove Park Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 3 October 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 July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, together with your senior and middle leaders, have shaped a school in which pupils are happy and keen to learn. The continued success of the school is based on your detailed knowledge of your pupils, an unwavering determination to help them achieve well, and hardworking, dedicated staff.

Leaders have created a culture which is open and welcoming. A sense of mutual respect and support pervades the school. During my visits to classrooms, the atmosphere was purposeful and pupils were appropriately engaged in a range of learning activities. Most of the staff completed the online survey, and all feel proud to work at Grove Park Primary School. The great majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire would recommend the school to others. Many parents comment positively about the school's work, highlighting how approachable the staff are and the high levels of support provided for their children.

In 2016, pupils' achievement at the end of key stage 2 declined. There was also a fall in the proportions of Year 1 pupils meeting the phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) screening check standard and children reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception Year. You acted decisively to increase the rate of pupils' progress and restore higher standards. Provisional results show that achievement rose in 2017, with pupils making better progress by the end of key stage 2, and more pupils attaining the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics in both key stages 1 and 2. The quality of phonics teaching improved,

leading to stronger progress. A greater proportion of children reached a good level of development, despite having lower starting points when they joined Reception Year.

Since the previous inspection, there has been a significant increase in the number of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This group accounts for about 30% of pupils, well above national levels. The rise in numbers is as a result of increased identification of additional needs of existing pupils and more pupils joining the school who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Senior leaders are determined to meet the needs of these pupils as well as possible. Nevertheless, some pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not able to attain the standard expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics, and this has an impact on the school's published data.

You have taken effective action to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. These were to raise the quality of teaching and strengthen middle leadership at the school. Governors sensibly commissioned an external evaluation, which combines self-evaluation with challenge from an external adviser. During the last academic year, this review process has provided helpful training for subject and phase leaders on how to approach their leadership roles. The leaders I met were invigorated and keen to develop their different subjects and their own leadership skills. Middle leaders have led improvements in teaching, such as increasing the expectation that pupils apply their basic skills in mathematics and explain their thinking more often. The reading scheme was changed to provide greater challenge for pupils, especially the most able. Reading support for disadvantaged pupils now encourages group discussion and better comprehension of texts. Work in pupils' books and the provisional 2017 results show the positive impact of these actions. However, senior and middle leaders acknowledge there is more to be done to ensure that the best practice is consistently applied throughout the school. Also, leaders do not yet evaluate thoroughly the impact of the actions they take on the progress of pupils.

Assessment of pupils' progress is regular and the progress of each pupil is analysed. Governors are aware of the level of concern shown for individual pupils and steps taken to support those in danger of falling behind. However, the performance of groups, such as pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, the most able and disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, is less well understood. School development plans do not identify targets or milestones for groups of pupils. This makes it difficult for governors to hold senior leaders to account for the actions they have taken to improve the progress of specific groups of pupils. Similarly, greater precision is required in order for leaders and governors to fully evaluate the school's use of additional pupil premium funding on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of good quality. You are committed to

ensuring that pupils are safe at all times and that a culture of safeguarding permeates the school. Leaders ensure that staff receive appropriate training. Due to strong relationships, staff know pupils well and they are alert to any concerns, which they follow up swiftly. They ensure that they seek the right advice from other agencies when necessary. Parents, staff and pupils are united in their view that pupils are safe in school. There are well-planned opportunities for pupils to learn to keep themselves safe, including online. Pupils are confident that any concerns they may have about bullying will be followed up rapidly and effectively. Pupils' attendance is above national levels.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision, including: the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements; leaders' responses to the disappointing 2016 outcomes; the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils; and the effectiveness of leaders in driving improvements in teaching.
- You have changed the deployment of teachers to improve the quality of teaching successfully. Two teachers who were underperforming at the time of the last inspection have left the school. An experienced, new lead teacher of the early years foundation stage joined the school in September 2016. She rapidly raised expectations and improved the quality of lesson planning to better meet the needs of the children as they join Reception Year. This includes an increasing number of children with very low starting points. Stronger teachers were allocated to classes in key stages 1 and 2, which needed to make the most progress. These actions have had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and the rates of pupils' progress.
- During my visits to classrooms, the deputy headteacher explained clearly the steps taken to develop staff and improve the quality of their practice. The most striking impact of professional development has been the increased accountability of middle leaders, and the switch from managing their area of responsibility to leading it. The phase leaders for key stages 1 and 2 show an accurate understanding of strengths and weaknesses in teaching and set out to improve provision. Early signs are positive, as the provisional 2017 results, the school's performance information and work in books show that pupils' progress has improved throughout the school. However, the full impact of the leadership shown by the middle leadership team on pupils' outcomes is not yet evident.
- A review of pupils' work showed that teaching focused on increased stretch and challenge in both mathematics and writing. This has enabled the most able pupils in Years 2 and 6 to attain higher levels. Where feedback meets leaders' expectations, it urges pupils to think more deeply about their work and to take responsibility for improving it themselves, with teachers' support. Work is underway to strengthen teaching in subjects other than English and mathematics. The science subject leader acknowledges there is much to do to develop the expertise of staff, particularly in the teaching of scientific enquiry.

- Leaders seek new ideas by visiting other schools. They experience useful challenge and support from colleagues in local schools, including when moderating pupils' work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school's self-evaluation is sharper and focuses on the impact of actions, for example by analysing the difference that additional funding makes to accelerating the progress of disadvantaged pupils
- improvement planning sets precise success criteria and milestones for pupils' progress, particularly for groups of pupils, including the most able, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- leaders continue work already started to improve the consistency of teaching across the school and curriculum.

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

Theresa Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your deputy headteacher, seven middle leaders and two governors, including the chair of the governing body. I visited classes across all year groups in the school, with your deputy headteacher. I reviewed samples of pupils' work in writing, mathematics and other subjects' books across key stages 1 and 2. I considered 46 responses by staff to Ofsted's online survey. I took careful account of 59 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including free-text comments, and conversations with parents picking up their children at the end of the school day. I spoke with pupils during playtime. I looked at documents, including: the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans; information about pupils' learning and progress; minutes of meetings; and records regarding safeguarding.