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Mrs Christine Farrell
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Farrell

Short inspection of Hamstel Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 28 June 2019, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection of your predecessor school.

Your high expectations and clarity of purpose are evident throughout the school. The school's motto, 'excellence in everything' permeates the school's curriculum and the work carried out in the classrooms. Leaders are committed and very effective in their different roles. They provide determined leadership that has been successful in bringing about improvements in teaching and learning. Leaders have brought together a cohesive and enthusiastic teaching team. Morale in the school is high. Staff are proud of the support you offer for pupils' personal, social and emotional development, as well as for their academic achievement. As one staff member commented to the inspector, 'We can make a difference to children's lives at Hamstel.'

Pupils enjoy coming to school. Leaders ensure that children are well prepared for their learning, for example by providing bagels for everyone as they arrive at school. To support pupils and families, you have appointed a pastoral team. Family workers engage with parents and pupils to develop positive relationships and to tackle any barriers to learning. Prompt and swift action ensures that issues are addressed early, and pupils come to school regularly. Consequently, pupils' attendance is consistently above the national average. The majority of parents consider that their children are happy at school. One parent, who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, said, 'Staff are lovely always listen to any concerns and my child always seems happy.' This view was typical of other comments made on the survey.

At the previous inspection of the predecessor school, leaders were asked to improve teaching by ensuring that pupils who had difficulty with their learning were quickly identified and helped. Your leaders have provided effective training to help teachers understand how to match tasks that meet the abilities of all pupils. Teachers' plans are scrutinised so that pupils who fall behind receive additional support. When we visited classes together we observed the impact your training has had upon improving teaching. Teachers provide clear steps and explanations so that pupils understand how they can be successful in their work. Your school results show that there has been an upward trend in the proportions of pupils attaining expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2.

Leaders were also asked to improve achievement in mathematics. You have introduced 'maths champions' into every year group to provide expertise in the teaching of mathematics. Leaders have ensured that teachers make consistent use of your chosen strategies. These provide opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of mathematics by using their reasoning skills. In pupils' books we saw an increasing amount of problem-solving work requiring pupils to apply their knowledge. In 2018, pupils' progress at the end of key stage 2 had improved and was average overall.

Since the school became part of an academy trust, the local governing board has used the support of the trust to improve the quality of their work. Governors now have an accurate and detailed understanding of the school's strengths and its priorities for improvement. Governors make good use of the school improvement plan to tailor their monitoring of the school's work. They receive reports and presentations from leaders as well as visiting the school to check that the information they have been given is accurate. In this way, they provide an effective level of support as well as holding leaders to account for improving the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

A strong culture of safeguarding is at the heart of the school community. This is reflected in leaders' provision of high-quality support for vulnerable pupils and their families. Leaders take swift action when concerns are brought to their attention. They work alongside external agencies so that early help is given to prevent the escalation of problems and difficulties.

Leaders are thorough with the checks made on those who work at the school. Records are well organised, and governors make regular visits to ensure that the information is kept up to date. Your committed team of staff are alert for any signs that children may be at risk of harm. They know how to record their concerns in a timely manner. Training and updates are provided through regular briefings and you respond to the local risks identified by leaders and the changing needs of pupils.

Pupils say that they feel safe and are well looked after. They have great confidence that adults in the school will listen to their concerns and deal with any issues. Pupils say that bullying rarely happens at their school because they have anti-bullying ambassadors who help to ensure that pupils know how to get along together. Pupils

understand how to keep themselves safe, especially when they are online and using the internet.

Inspection findings

- In 2018, the published information indicates that by the end of Year 6 pupils made slower progress in writing than they did in reading and mathematics. Also, the proportion of pupils who attained the high standard in writing was below the national averages for all prior attaining groups.
- Leaders have introduced new strategies to develop pupils' skills in writing. Your leaders have made effective use of professional development to ensure that the teaching of writing is consistent across the school. In the lessons we visited, teachers ensure that pupils develop a good understanding of a story's structure. Pupils are encouraged to collect and 'magpie' for new phrases and words as they share high-quality class texts. The most able pupils are challenged to extend their written work by using complex phrases and ambitious words. For example, a Year 4 pupil demonstrated her understanding of suspense by writing, 'The mysterious boat sailed over the horizon with a dragon at its head. At first nothing happened.'
- Work in pupils' English books shows that over time they are making at least good progress. Standards of presentation are high, and pupils are developing their writing style and fluency through compositions of increasing length as they move through the school. However, this quality of writing is not reflected in pupils' writing in other subjects. Teachers do not have the same expectations for pupils' accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar. In addition, pupils do not make the same progress in their technical writing, such as non-chronological reports, because there are fewer opportunities to practise these skills.
- In 2018, the progress of disadvantaged pupils was lower when compared to that of other pupils at the end of Year 6, especially in reading. Your leaders have placed a stronger focus on reviewing the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Teachers are held to account for the progress disadvantaged pupils make in their regular meetings with senior leaders. The quality of teaching is consistently good, and this has helped disadvantaged pupils to make positive progress. The school's own information indicates that disadvantaged pupils are making stronger gains from their starting points. A pastoral team is on hand to provide support for disadvantaged pupils. They ensure that pupils' social and emotional needs are met so that pupils are ready to learn.
- Leaders are committed to ensuring that disadvantaged pupils develop as confident and independent readers. Pupils who are not making progress read daily to reading assistants. Teachers track pupils' individual reading closely and there are weekly opportunities to select a range of books from a well-stocked library. Pupils who spoke to the inspector discussed their favourite authors and read with maturity from a variety of books.
- Leaders are currently revisiting the wider curriculum. Your leaders aim to increase the depth of subject knowledge that deepens pupils' understanding across a wide range of subjects. Subject leaders are developing their skills. They check that teachers' plans cover the skills pupils are required to learn. Leaders evaluate

pupils' work so that they have a good understanding of pupils' achievements in their areas of responsibility. However, pupils' overall experience of the curriculum is variable, with some subjects being less developed. This means that pupils do not build up their knowledge and understanding in sufficient depth over time.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils develop their range of writing for different purposes and in greater depth so that more attain the higher standards
- teachers have equally high expectations of how pupils apply their skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar in subjects other than English
- the wider curriculum is well planned and sequenced to enable pupils to develop their deeper knowledge and understanding through links in their learning.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Southend-on-Sea. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steve Mellors
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and other leaders in the school. I spoke with a group of governors from the local governing board, including the vice-chair of the governing body. I also met with the chief executive officer of the trust. I also spoke with staff. I observed learning jointly with you and your deputy headteacher. I met with groups of pupils. I scrutinised a selection of the pupils' workbooks with senior leaders. I examined a range of the school's documentation, including its self-evaluation document, improvement plan and documents related to safeguarding. I considered the views of parents by speaking with them after school. I also analysed the 38 responses to Parent View.