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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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26 January 2018

Mrs Lucie Wilson
Acting Head of School
High Halstow Primary School
Harrison Drive
High Halstow
Rochester
Kent
ME3 8TF

Dear Mrs Wilson

Short inspection of High Halstow Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 16 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.

The school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You acted swiftly after joining the school last year, from another school within the Williamson Trust, to provide continuity and stability. Parents and staff appreciate the renewed vigour brought by your leadership and the positive changes you have made. One parent commented, 'The school is thriving under the current leadership.'

You, and other leaders are taking effective action to promote a consistently high quality of teaching across the school and to ensure good progress for some pupils who have been affected previously by a relatively high turnover of staff. The Williamson Trust provides strong support for the work of the school. Its clear and ambitious vision contributes commendably to improvement. This is because the decisions made by the trust are based on a detailed understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Furthermore, you have been ably supported by the trust's primary executive headteacher. Resources within the trust are deployed effectively to support teachers and other staff so that a comprehensive and individualised programme of continuing professional development is in place.

To promote continuing improvement, you have implemented revised approaches to reading and mathematics, and there has been a necessary overhaul of the wider curriculum in partnership with other trust schools. You acknowledge that pupils' performance is not yet as strong in subjects other than English and mathematics. Helpfully, specialist subject teachers from secondary schools in the trust enhance

the provision for the most able pupils. Pupils value opportunities to take part in a number of trust-wide sporting competitions. Transition arrangements as pupils move on to secondary schools within the trust are well managed.

Your evaluation of the school's performance is thorough, leading to sensible and accurate priorities for improvement in the school's development plan. As a result, all school leaders are well aware of the strengths of the school and those aspects which could be better.

Children make a strong start during early years. A suitable and imaginative range of activities encourages children's communication skills, including writing. Staff manage children's learning well and help them develop the necessary skills to be ready for the next stage in their schooling.

You are aware that Year 2 pupils did not show that they had continued the rapid progress they made in Reception Year, during Years 1 and 2. You are taking effective action to remedy this for current pupils, including in their phonics learning. Your careful analysis of key stage 2 pupils' achievement in 2017 has allowed you to rigorously set about addressing any weaknesses you identified.

You ensure that pupils' development is well supported by the learning environment. Pupils are friendly, polite and keen to learn and work hard. Older pupils relish the responsibilities they are given, for example to help pupils who may be on their own at lunchtime or assist with class registers and general duties in the lunch hall. You are working effectively to address the concerns of a few parents about pupils' behaviour. During my visit, in classes and on the playground, the behaviour of pupils was both positive and respectful. In lessons, pupils worked well together, showing respect to their peers and staff.

Governance is strong and governors are ambitious for the school. They carefully monitor the actions leaders take to improve the school and hold leaders to account through checking appropriate and timely milestones. Importantly, they know what is working well and what leaders must do to improve the school further. Governors are keen that pupils have a wide range of memorable experiences and leave the school as confident learners and well prepared for the future.

You are taking helpful and sensible steps to increase engagement between the school, parents and the wider community. This includes your regular meetings with parents and the use of social media and email. Parents reported that their children settle quickly and confidently into Reception class and that their children are happy.

At the time of the previous inspection, you were asked to improve the challenge of the work set for the most able pupils and to improve the proportion of outstanding teaching across the school. There is evidence of challenge for the most able pupils in books and in lessons, and the development of outstanding teaching is progressing well as an ongoing priority.

Safeguarding is effective.

The Williamson Trust and the leadership team have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Governors and officers of the trust check records and practice regularly, to ensure that policies are implemented correctly. Parents are confident that their children are safe and well looked after at school.

Staff are suitably trained and are very aware of their responsibilities and the procedures to keep pupils safe. As the leader with overall responsibility for safeguarding, you know the school's pupils and families well. You are tenacious in ensuring that correct and helpful support is made available for the most vulnerable pupils. The school works well with external agencies for the benefit of these pupils. Records are meticulously maintained and reflect the care and attention you place in this area of your work.

Pupils reported that they can talk to a member of staff or yourself if they have any concerns, and the majority of pupils feel that these are resolved satisfactorily. The school equips pupils with the knowledge and skills to keep themselves safe online.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, I looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision, including: the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements; pupils' achievements in reading; the effectiveness of teaching and pupils' progress across key stage 1; provision for the most able pupils; and how the wider curriculum develops pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding.
- There is good evidence that leaders' robust approach to improving pupils' reading is having a positive impact, although this is not yet fully embedded. The current 'year of reading' has raised the profile of reading across the school. Pupils and parents talked excitedly about the school's current reading 'challenge' and enjoy opportunities to read together. Effective additional support helps pupils who fall behind in reading to catch up, although sometimes pupils' progress slows when they are not supported well to choose books that match their reading ability.
- As a result of leaders' focused intervention and support to improve the quality of teaching in key stage 1, current pupils are making good progress. For example, staff training by the early years leader has improved the consistency and quality of phonics teaching. Pupils are better able to sound out letters confidently and demonstrate resilience and determination to improve their reading.
- Leaders make good use of specialist staff from the trust who work in partnership with teachers to develop provision for the most able pupils. Evidence in pupils' books shows that tasks set are often well matched to the needs of the most able pupils. However, this is not yet consistently the case.
- Leaders' judicious attention to the wider curriculum is resulting in pupils experiencing a broader range of knowledge and understanding and greater opportunity for them to develop their skills. For example, pupils' work shows that they are improving at accurately explaining their findings from science experiments. However, leaders recognise that there is more to do in this area.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching continues to develop, in key stage 1 and in reading across the school, so that pupils make the best possible progress
- teaching is consistently good and provides challenge for pupils across the curriculum, especially for the most able.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the Williamson Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Medway. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Frances Nation
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, we visited the classrooms together, and spoke to pupils about their work during two learning walks. I met with you and other senior leaders to discuss the school's development plan, curriculum and safeguarding arrangements. I listened to pupils from Years 2, 4, 5 and 6 read. Together with a group of senior leaders and representatives of the Williamson Trust, I looked at a wide range of pupils' work. I met with the chair, chief executive and executive primary headteacher of the Williamson Trust and the chair and vice chair of the local advisory committee (governors). A wide range of school documentation was scrutinised. I considered three responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire, 24 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey and 44 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as speaking with several parents.