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Mrs Collette Mather
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Mather

Short inspection of Ashdene Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 30 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 January 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

There have been some notable improvements since the school's last inspection. Pupils' progress in reading, mathematics and, in particular, writing has been very strong. In 2017, progress and attainment for Year 6 pupils in these key subjects were significantly above the national average. Pupils' achievement in Year 2 was similarly impressive.

You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved substantially. A rigorous new approach to planning and assessment ensures that teachers closely match work to pupils' needs to ensure that they develop the appropriate skills in each subject effectively. You have also enhanced teachers' development of their skills by establishing a new programme of training. Staff observe and learn from each other's work. They then apply the most effective strategies to their own teaching, which improves their confidence.

Leaders of subjects other than English and mathematics make more regular checks on standards in their subject. They identify areas for development and provide

support to teachers to bring about improvement. As a result of these actions, pupils make strong progress. For example, in history, there has been a successful move for teachers to encourage pupils to develop their own questioning skills when considering historical sources. I saw convincing evidence of this in action in workbooks in key stage 2, for instance, where pupils' questioning of pictures of ancient Greek artefacts enabled them to make useful inferences about life in ancient Greece. You have also introduced a more detailed tracking system for subjects other than mathematics and English. You recognise that you now need more firmly to establish this, so that leaders of these subjects have the clearest possible overview of how rapidly pupils make progress.

I also saw good evidence that teachers now give pupils plenty of opportunities to apply their writing skills in other subjects. For example, in science in key stage 2, pupils write detailed explanations about electricity, correctly using scientific language like 'cell' and 'circuit'. In key stage 1, pupils write comparisons at their appropriate ability level to show how life in Tudor times was different from today. You have raised teachers' expectations of presentation and the majority of pupils' books are now neat, showing the increased pride pupils take in their work.

You analyse all the available evidence, including assessment information, and have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and priorities for further improvement. For instance, you are ambitious to see further strengthening of the quality of teaching and you aim to see even larger proportions of pupils achieving the higher standard in the tests at the end of Year 2 and Year 6.

Your staff are very positive about the work of the school and say that you and your senior leaders are highly supportive. They value the training you provide and recognise that you do all you can to manage their workload, including initiatives such as a revised policy on how teachers can make clear to pupils how they may improve their work. Parents and carers are equally positive. A large majority are very appreciative of the education you provide. Typically, parents say that their children are proud of their school and feel that they 'thrive' and 'flourish' during their time there.

Governors know the school well and are ambitious for pupils to achieve as highly as possible. They challenge leaders rigorously and hold them to account effectively. Governors have a wide range of experience and skills that enable them to fulfil their role successfully.

The local authority and the school's independently commissioned adviser have an accurate view of the quality of education the school provides. They give an appropriate level of support and are confident that leaders have a steady hand on the tiller.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You keep detailed records that are of high quality. You maintain a close

watch on the effectiveness of procedures, taking actions such as creating a checklist of the steps staff must take when reporting a concern. The school's record of the necessary checks on members of staff is complete and goes beyond requirements, including, for instance, a register of safeguarding training that staff have received.

You have established a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. You train your staff well and they have a secure knowledge of the signs of various types of abuse. Pupils feel safe because your staff give them the information they need to stay safe. For example, they have a thorough knowledge of the risks they may face online and how to manage them. Pupils also understand bullying in its various forms and say that it never happens in school. They are confident that teachers will handle effectively any concerns they may have.

Inspection findings

- At the start of my visit, we agreed a number of key lines of enquiry. I have already written about how well you have addressed the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. I have also commented on how effectively you manage safeguarding.
- Another key line of enquiry concerned the progress in English and mathematics of current pupils, including those who are disadvantaged. Senior leaders check the quality of teaching and learning very effectively. Teachers benefit from carefully planned training, including the new programme mentioned earlier. The evidence from pupils' work and from the school's own assessment information shows that all groups of pupils are making strong progress in these subjects. For example, in mathematics in Year 6, pupils eligible for the pupil premium successfully solve complex puzzles involving missing angles in two-dimensional shapes. In Year 2, they solve problems involving missing numbers, which require them to understand the connection between multiplication and division. You are determined to continue with your strategies to ensure that you sustain pupils' current rates of progress.
- My next focus was the strength of pupils' progress in subjects other than English and mathematics. I looked at a range of work and found that pupils across all year groups make strong progress. There is a clear focus on acquiring relevant knowledge, understanding and skills at a brisk pace and often at a high level. For example, pupils in Year 5 write knowledgeably about tectonic plates when explaining earthquakes in geography. Topic books in Year 1 show pupils developing a range of skills effectively, including in art and science, through work focused on the story of 'The Three Little Pigs'. Subject leaders have improved their checks on the quality of teaching and learning in their subject and have a clear view of pupils' achievement. Leaders are now keen to refine their tracking procedures further and have introduced a more detailed system. You recognise that you now need to embed this system to ensure an even clearer understanding of pupils' progress.
- My final focus was how well leaders have reduced absence and persistent absence among pupils who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The most recent information shows that

there were substantial improvements for these groups in 2016/2017. You have taken effective action to bring this about. Your strategies include rewards in assembly for high attendance and contacting parents as soon as their child's absence becomes a concern. Rates of attendance in the current school year are above average for almost all pupils. You recognise, however, that the rate of absence for pupils who are disadvantaged is too high and that you need to continue with your strategies to reduce this.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue with their strategies, including embedding their new tracking system for subjects other than English and mathematics, to sustain pupils' rapid progress across the curriculum
- they further reduce the rate of absence for pupils who are disadvantaged.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Quinn
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I carried out short visits with you to all year groups, including the early years. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation summary, action plans for school improvement, minutes of meetings of the governing body and records connected with the safeguarding of children. I held discussions with you, other members of staff, governors and pupils. I had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority and with your privately commissioned school improvement partner. I analysed pupils' work and the school's own assessment information. I evaluated 136 responses received through Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and 22 responses to the staff survey. There were no other survey responses.