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Mrs Jane Douglass
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Douglass

Short inspection of North Downs Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 February 2018 with Ofsted Inspector Francois Walker, 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.

This school continues to be good.

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

You lead with total commitment. You have a clear vision for improving the school. This is shared by governors and staff at all levels. Since your arrival, you have built on previous strengths and created capacity for further improvement. The vast majority of parents and carers who spoke to inspectors or replied to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire are very positive about the school and the way you lead it.

Classroom visits across all three sites showed the school to be an industrious and happy place. Pupils understand that they come to school to learn. They were happy and confident to discuss their work with inspectors. They told inspectors that they appreciate the varied curriculum and the interesting topic themes they study. During a science lesson about materials, pupils in Year 2 were delighted to discuss why dungarees were good for crawling toddlers. Expectations were high. Their teacher insisted that they gave full and precise answers, rehearsing spoken sentences in preparation for the written task that was to follow. Pupils in Year 5 were gleeful at the prospect of becoming estate agents, using persuasive language to sell a Mayan house. They understood fully what was expected of them and were working hard to complete the task in the time allocated. It was clear that their recently acquired knowledge and understanding of Mayan culture was being drawn on to make their writing more interesting and effective.

Our visits to classrooms were overwhelmingly positive and confirmed your view that pupils behave well and have good attitudes to learning. However, some visits highlighted the inconsistency in the quality of mathematics teaching across the school. We noticed that, in some classrooms, expectation is not as high as it might be. Evidence in books also showed that more opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical knowledge, by solving problems and explaining their reasoning, would be beneficial. Our classroom visits also helped confirm that the school's current system for tracking pupils' progress and attainment is not as effective as it should be.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors acknowledged the many strengths of the school, for example pupils were making consistently good progress in reading, writing and mathematics and there were many strengths in the different aspects of leadership and governance of the school. Inspectors also identified the need to provide more opportunities for pupils to use their reading, writing and mathematics skills in a wider range of subjects and contexts, as well as highlighting the need for better communication with parents. Leaders have addressed these matters successfully. Evidence collected during classroom visits shows that pupils have many meaningful experiences to develop their English and mathematical skills across the wider curriculum. All parents who spoke to inspectors were positive about the school and the way leaders communicate with them. The very large majority who replied to Ofsted's online questionnaire were positive. A direct comparison with the parent survey at the time of the last inspection also confirms better levels of satisfaction from current parents.

Since the last inspection, leaders have continued the important process of self-evaluation. You were able to explain very clearly the school's many strengths, as well as the priorities for development. You know that, although pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are doing well, they need to make even more progress to catch up with other pupils. You have also made improving the progress pupils make in mathematics a high priority. You agreed with me that the current system for tracking pupils' progress and attainment is overgenerous. It does not give leaders and governors accurate enough information about pupils' outcomes, nor does it give teachers an accurate view of the age-related expectations for pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

Arrangements to safeguard pupils are effective. Policies, procedures and day-to-day routines are sound. Importantly, the culture to safeguard pupils is strong. Staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities to protect children. They know what to do if they have concerns.

Most parents and pupils who replied to their respective online surveys were positive about the levels of care and support available at the school. All parents who spoke to inspectors during the inspection felt their children were safe in school, as did all staff who responded to the staff survey.

Inspection findings

- Senior leaders have identified teaching and learning in mathematics as key priorities for improvement due to the disappointing outcomes at the end of Year 6 in 2017. Most pupils attain well in mathematics by the end of key stage 1. However, rates of progress are below average and not as strong as those in reading and writing as pupils move through key stage 2. Additional training for staff, improved resources and the support of the local authority are helping to address this. However, the inspection highlighted inconsistency in teachers' expectations and the lack of opportunities for reasoning and problem-solving as barriers that still need to be overcome if outcomes in mathematics are to improve.
- Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds do well at North Downs. Small numbers make it difficult to compare their academic outcomes with national averages. However, it is clear that most disadvantaged pupils make good progress academically, and that their outcomes are improving over time. Their social and emotional development is also supported well. Additional funding is spent wisely. Extra staff are employed and targets for these pupils are closely related to their outcomes. However, leaders know that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds need to make even better progress if they are to attain as highly as other pupils.
- The school's curriculum meets the needs of its pupils well. Pupils are particularly positive about what they learn and the way that teachers make learning enjoyable. The curriculum is well thought through. Leaders are constantly looking for ways to improve it. The continuing development of the outdoor learning environment is one example of this. The extra-curricular offer is also strong. Pupils appreciate the range of clubs they can attend. Eighty-five percent of pupils who replied to the online questionnaire indicated that they take advantage of clubs and additional experiences organised by the school.
- Systems to track pupils' progress and attainment are not as strong as they could be. Current practice presents over-optimistic predictions and an inaccurate representation of the age-related attainment of pupils. Teachers are aware that the system is not accurate enough. Leaders know that the system needs further refinement in order for them to have a more precise overview of pupils' outcomes. Governors are not served well by the current system. For instance, they are not able to know with any certainty if outcomes in mathematics will improve this year because the information they receive is not credible.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- systems to track pupils' progress and attainment are improved so that:
 - teachers have a more effective tool to plan pupils' next steps in learning
 - leaders have a more precise understanding of pupils' progress and attainment

- governors are better equipped to hold leaders to account for improving pupils' outcomes
- pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds make more rapid progress so that their outcomes improve to match more closely those of other pupils
- pupils' progress in mathematics improves, especially by the end of key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Close
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors visited classrooms on all three sites of the school, assessing the progress pupils were making and talking to them about their learning. They observed pupils' behaviour throughout the day. Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body, accompanied by three other governors, and two representative groups of pupils. The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. An inspector talked to parents at the start of the school day. Inspectors took into account 103 replies to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire and the accompanying free-text comments, 28 replies to the staff survey and 174 replies to the pupil survey. A wide range of documentation was scrutinised, including the single central record of recruitment checks, safeguarding documents, pupils' progress information, the school's self-evaluation and development planning and records of visits by the local authority.