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Mrs Jo Hygate
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Dear Mrs Hygate

Short inspection of Worth Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 June 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 October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Parents are passionate about their choice of school and effusive in their praise of what it provides. They emphasise the family feel to the school. The friendliness of the community was palpable as I met parents at the school gate. All of those that expressed a view would recommend the school to other parents. One view expressed by a parent, typical of the overwhelmingly positive response, was, 'Worth is an incredibly caring and nurturing school with strong leadership and experienced teaching staff.'

The commitment of all staff, but teachers especially, in steadying the school during a turbulent period over the last year is widely recognised by parents and governors. I heard how the developing role of the assistant headteacher, now head of school, was key to this stability. The combined effort has contributed well to parents' continuing confidence and pupils' sustained enjoyment of school. Your sensitive leadership as executive headteacher has led to the constructive approach of building on the school's many existing strengths to move forward with renewed focus and purpose. You spoke of this as 'refreshing' what staff were already doing, but making the approach to securing improvement more systematic. Staff morale is high. They are confident in the leadership and direction of the school. 'Worth is a happy and positive place to work and learn,' was how one member of staff put it.

The school has a calm and purposeful learning atmosphere. Early years children get off to a good start. Their strong progress was clear to see in the learning journeys

that I sampled. Across the school, pupils work hard and have positive attitudes to learning. In discussion, they respect each other's ideas and work very well together in pairs and groups. Teachers' subject knowledge is secure. They use this well to make clear for pupils what they are learning and why, providing effective tasks and activities to secure their understanding. This was an area for improvement following the school's previous inspection and is now one of the school's strengths. Teachers help pupils to make links with their previous learning and between different subjects to make learning more interesting and engaging.

Your strategy of involving subject leaders more in securing improvements has contributed well to rising expectations and increasing ambition. You make sure that any improvements are likely to last by implementing systems to underpin the changes and check carefully that they work as intended. For example, you have introduced closer and more frequent tracking of pupils' progress. You are helping staff to make better use of pupils' starting points to raise the expectations of what they could achieve. The previous inspection recommended linking school improvement to measurable targets. Your school improvement plan makes use of measurable targets and I saw evidence that you use regular reviews to adapt and refine the plan. We discussed the importance of also checking thoroughly whether improvements that are less easily measured are also secure, for example the difference made by training to increase the depth of teachers' questioning.

You have begun important efforts to ensure that more pupils than previously reach the highest standards already achieved by the most able. This is a work in progress and you know that there is more to be done. Expectations are similarly rising for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, drawing on leadership expertise in this aspect of education from elsewhere. This is one example of how the school is becoming much more 'outward looking' than it has been in the past for the benefit of pupils, teachers and leaders.

Governance is very strong and is a significant asset to the school. The governing body, guided ably by the impressive chair, demonstrates clear strategic thinking. The local authority has provided effective support for the school, especially to support governors' financial planning to ensure that the school continues to prosper and thrive in the future. Governors ask searching questions of school leaders to challenge them appropriately and hold them to account in the shared drive to secure the best possible quality of education.

Safeguarding is effective.

All necessary pre-employment checks are in place and recorded methodically on the single central register. This record goes beyond statutory requirements to show a clear, single overview of extensive pre-employment checks and training. Staff are well trained, with training relevant to their different roles. Written records are suitably detailed. They show that staff are very alert to concerns and use the school systems correctly for reporting them. Leaders' measured responses to these concerns and resulting action are recorded clearly. Governors systematically audit safeguarding arrangements to ensure that all requirements are met. They respond

promptly to any areas that can be further strengthened, and recheck in a timely manner that any necessary action has been taken.

Pupils and parents have complete confidence that pupils are safe in school. Leaders and staff know individuals and families very well. They work closely with parents to promote pupils' welfare and well-being. Recent surveys of pupils carried out by the school show that they feel very safe in school and know adults that they feel confident will help them if they have any worries. This backs up what pupils told me during the inspection. All parents and staff who responded to the inspection survey agreed, most of them strongly, that the school keeps its pupils safe.

Inspection findings

- The small size of each year group means that data about the school's performance must be used carefully. With the slight fluctuations usually seen with such small numbers, broadly, pupils' achievement has been relatively consistent since it was judged good at the previous inspection. However, leaders recognised that last year's leavers had not done well enough in reading and promptly set about evaluating why. They analysed the results closely to identify priorities for improvement for the current year. During the inspection, I explored with you how effective leaders' response has been.
- The importance of reading at Worth Primary is clear to see. Pupils value the wide range of high-quality books that they are able to enjoy. The literacy leader has led successful work to raise the profile of reading. Rejuvenated and frequently refreshed with a rotation of books, the attractive library is used often by pupils. The 'reading rangers' appointed among older pupils promote enjoyment of books well with younger and sometimes more reluctant readers. I observed the 'rangers' explain carefully the meaning of unfamiliar words, a suitable challenge for both the older and younger pupils. Pupils were keen to read aloud to me and did so clearly, with fluency and expression. Younger pupils and children in the early years use their strongly developing phonic knowledge readily and with confidence. Opportunities to learn and practise phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) are promoted prominently throughout the Reception Year environment. However, there are fewer appropriate choices of accessible texts in the early years for children at the early stages of enjoying books.
- The tracking of pupils' reading ages by the subject leader shows significant recent gains. Training for staff has focused on using high-quality texts and effective questioning to deepen pupils' understanding and interpretation of what they read. Ready access to audio books broadens pupils' experience of high-quality texts to develop more advanced comprehension skills. Leaders report that this approach is especially helpful for those whose ability to decode the printed word is less well developed. However, leaders have not fully evaluated the impact of these strategies on developing the broad range of pupils' reading skills.
- In recent years, pupils have missed too much school. An important focus for this inspection was to see how successfully leaders are securing much-needed improvements in pupils' attendance. Pupils enjoy school and the overwhelming majority attend regularly. The importance of not missing school unnecessarily is

emphasised with parents. You reward good habits and investigate absences thoroughly. Overall attendance rates are considerably higher this year than they have been in recent years, including for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As one parent I met told me, 'Even when my daughter is poorly, she doesn't want to miss school.' Although occasionally some pupils may have good reason for missing school more regularly, your appropriate determination to continue to tackle this issue is reflective of leaders' approach of not looking for easy excuses.

- Another area that I investigated was how well disadvantaged pupils get on at Worth. Disadvantaged pupils make at least similar and sometimes better progress than other pupils nationally who have similar starting points. The most able disadvantaged pupils do similarly well, with a number reaching the highest standards in recent years. Your analysis of this group of pupils shows good awareness of the complex make-up and overlap of pupils' differing needs, such as those who are disadvantaged and who also have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders place a strong emphasis on making sure that disadvantaged pupils, like all others, benefit from consistently effective teaching. However, leaders and governors are not able to pin down the value that is added by the small amount of pupil premium funding that the school receives. You recognise the importance of deepening your evaluation to try to show this.
- During this inspection, I also wanted to explore with you how successful leaders are in creating a culture of ambition and high expectation to lift outcomes for pupils further, especially the most able. You, with the governors, demonstrate clear strategic vision and have begun to drive greater challenge, ambition and aspiration for pupils' outcomes. The most able pupils tend to make similar progress to other pupils in the school and exceed age-related expectations of attainment. However, leaders are correct in their determination that, with strong and sustained progress over time, more pupils from lower starting points could reach high standards in their work. You have an accurate view of aspects of this work that are already going well and where further attention is needed. Teachers demonstrate awareness of the need to challenge the most able pupils, but the success of the strategies they use remains mixed at this stage. We were in close agreement about the examples we saw when visiting classes together.
- The school's assessment information shows that most pupils across the school are working at least at age-related expectations. Although there is some understandable variation from cohort to cohort, a higher proportion is working at greater depth or at a higher standard than has been evident in the past.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they build on the work already started to ensure that any pupil that has the potential to work at greater depth or reach high standards does so
- they evaluate more deeply the difference made by particular strategies to secure the best possible improvement

- the proportion of pupils that miss too much school continues to reduce.

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

Clive Dunn
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held discussions with you, other leaders and staff and governors. I telephoned a representative of the local authority and spoke informally with parents at the school gate to gather their views. You accompanied me as I visited all classes to observe teaching and learning, look at pupils' work and talk to pupils about their learning. I also spoke with pupils at lunchtime and heard some of them read in the library. There were 25 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as eight confidential questionnaire responses from staff. I analysed these and considered all of the written comments they contained alongside other inspection evidence. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire, but I noted the views expressed by pupils during the school's own survey. Before visiting, I reviewed the school's website and a variety of information about the school's performance over time. On site, I scrutinised safeguarding arrangements.