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Mrs Priscilla Crane
Headteacher
Sparhawk Infant School and Nursery
Sparhawk Avenue
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Dear Mrs Crane

Short inspection of Sparhawk Infant School and Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 3 December 2015, 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 March 2012.

This school continues to be good.

You have successfully led staff through a period of significant change. Changes in senior leadership, increased numbers of pupils on roll and extensions to the building have all gone smoothly, and successfully built on the work of the previous headteacher. You have added rigour to the school's work, particularly when checking how well pupils are doing. Senior leaders are well informed about pupils' achievements. They follow your lead in their methodical approach to school improvement and staff value their support.

The staff are a strong team. They are united in their determination to find that extra piece of the jigsaw that will enable each pupil to succeed. Teachers' enthusiasm for teaching and their commitment to improving pupils' achievement is evident in their behaviour and in the way that they organise their classrooms. Classrooms are vibrant, welcoming and provide opportunities for pupils to be curious and to explore their learning.

Staff create an environment where pupils become confident learners. Pupils are keen to get on with their work and their work reveals their individuality. They make good use of resources and the help from staff and their friends. Pupils talk to one another about what they are doing. Often they talk to themselves, reading or rehearsing what they are doing. This works well to check their work for quality and to see how they could find out more. Spontaneous discussion between pupils and staff means that learning proceeds at a good pace.

At the previous inspection, leaders were asked to raise standards in reading and to raise teachers' expectations of the middle- and higher-attaining pupils. Not enough pupils reached the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics. The required improvements have taken place.

- For each year since the previous inspection, pupils have left the school with skills in reading that are just above the national average, and this represents good progress during their time in school.
- Pupils practise reading frequently, particularly reading their own work aloud to check for meaning and mistakes.
- Over the past three years, more pupils have achieved higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teaching staff have high expectations for all pupils, including those who are middle or higher attainers.
- Teachers routinely provide opportunities for pupils to extend their knowledge and thinking, and pupils respond enthusiastically to the challenges provided.

It is clear that the school is in safe hands because leaders at all levels are thorough in checking and assessing the school's work. As a result, they know what works well and act quickly when improvements are needed. For example, you identified that the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters represent) was not consistently good. Training was provided and changes made to how the sessions were taught. These things have improved the teaching of phonics. Although there is still some work to do to make sure that all pupils reach the expected standard by the time they leave the school, high-quality teaching of sounds and letters was observed during this inspection.

Central to the school's work is the outward-looking approach to checking the quality of teaching and pupils' learning. Collaboration with local schools, visits to high-performing schools and the involvement of local authority advisers are working well to bring new ideas into school. Staff reflect on their practice in the light of what they find and you provide training for staff that exemplifies good practice. An example of where this has worked well is in the improvement of phonics teaching.

There are two aspects identified during this inspection that will help to develop the school's work further. These aspects will build on the work already undertaken and the two of them are closely linked together. The first involves the use of long-term targets. Although the action plan is clear about what needs to be done, by whom, when and how the actions will be monitored, it is not as clear about the measures to use to see if the results are good enough. The second involves the governing body. Governors play their part in coming into school to check on their areas of responsibility but they need to challenge leaders and managers more about whether the actions are successful in reaching the agreed goals.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have made sure that the school's safeguarding arrangements are effective. Staff are very clear that even the smallest of concerns must be referred to the senior staff responsible for child protection. They do this conscientiously and appropriate records are kept of any concerns and the actions taken by senior staff. All required checks are made when new staff are recruited or when new checks are introduced for all staff.

The annual review of the safeguarding policy will take place this month. The current written policy provides accurate and sufficient information to meet the requirements of the statutory guidance in place when the policy was implemented. Subsequent changes to statutory guidance are well known and understood by staff because you have kept them up to date with the changes.

Staff understand the wide range of issues that must be considered and acted on to make sure that pupils are safe. The first staff meeting each term usefully includes information or training on child protection. Staff know their responsibilities in relation to children missing from education, female genital mutilation, child sexual exploitation and extremism. There is a policy for the prevention of extremism and radicalisation, which is available on the school's website and accompanied by a helpful poster for parents.

Inspection findings

- The quality of the assessments of pupils' skills has improved considerably since your appointment. Staff and governors are much better equipped to understand them now. As a result, staff and governors are well informed about how well each pupil performs in relation to an expected standard for their age. Senior leaders use this information well to identify areas for development and to take action to remedy weaknesses. Teachers make good use of assessments to improve their practice. For example, in the teaching of phonics across the school and in early years provision for developing physical and social skills, the improvements already make a positive difference to pupils' achievements.
- You are very methodical in your approach to checking and developing the school's work. This provides clarity, logic and transparency. Examples include progress meetings where each pupil's achievements are discussed, and revisions to the curriculum to make sure that the skills relevant to the particular needs of pupils at your school are matched well to the activities provided. Staff know what you expect of them. They welcome the opportunities to show how well pupils are doing and have raised their expectations of what pupils can achieve.

- Staff are aware of the lower achievement of boys, disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs. In most cases the gap narrows over time because the support they receive helps pupils to make good progress. Improved teaching and assessment for all pupils also make a difference to the pupils who are falling behind. For example, teachers now make sure that pupils of all abilities get the help they need quickly to address any mistakes or misunderstandings. This often happens at the end of a lesson, which avoids the need for additional support and reinforces the school's inclusive ethos.
- The work done to improve pupils' attendance is starting to have an effect, particularly on pupils who do not attend regularly enough or who arrive late in the morning. The importance of good attendance is very clear to parents and reminders to pupils are displayed prominently throughout the school.
- Almost all of the questionnaires received during this inspection were entirely positive about the work of the school. These views are consistent with those gained from the school's most recent questionnaires for parents and pupils. A few parents raised issues relating to the support for their particular circumstances, or getting enough information about their child's progress, but they are broadly positive about their children's experiences of the school over time.
- Although the ambition of staff and governors is for pupils to achieve better than expected standards and progress, the action plan and the tracking of pupils' progress do not set specific goals to match this aspiration. Pupils' individual progress is measured against age-related expectations, which means that staff and governors know if pupils are on track to meet an expected standard. But they do not know clearly how well pupils are doing towards better than expected standards or according to pupils' potential to make good progress from their individual starting points.
- The governing body is ambitious for pupils to do well. Each governor has responsibility for checking progress through particular sections of the action plan and knows what to look for when coming into school. You give governors a report before each meeting and invite questions that they want to follow up at the meetings. This helps governors to challenge senior leaders but they need to be more active and probing in their involvement and questioning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- pupils' attendance is in line with the national average
- pupils reach the expected standard in phonics
- long-term targets are used to measure progress through the action plan
- governors provide high-quality challenge to the senior leadership team.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, and the Director of Children's Services for Norfolk local authority.

Yours sincerely

Heather Yaxley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I scrutinised the single central register of checks and other documents relating to safeguarding pupils and child protection. Meetings were held with school leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and school staff. Informal discussions were held with parents before the start of the school day and pupils in lessons. I observed lessons across the school with leaders. Additional documentation was analysed, including governing body reports, the school's self-evaluation and action plans, information about pupils' attendance and achievement, and responses to the school's questionnaires to pupils and parents. I analysed 73 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire from parents, seven from pupils and 19 from staff.