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Mrs Sonia Nickerson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Nickerson

Short inspection of Moorings Way Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 3 February 2016, 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 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There was a noticeable dip in the school's performance after that inspection. Several interim headteachers had responsibility for the school on a temporary basis. The local authority and the governors appointed you in the spring of 2015 to bring stability to the school. You have an excellent working relationship with your deputy headteacher. Together, as a senior leadership team, you have galvanised the staff so that the school is improving quickly.

When you joined the school you judged accurately that standards had dropped and that some aspects of its work needed to improve. The local authority and the governors agreed with you. You acted decisively and put in place a range of new policies, procedures and practices. The deputy headteacher supported this process willingly. Straight away leaders focused on appropriate changes to teaching. You set high expectations for the staff and pupils. You gave staff a tight set of minimum expectations for every lesson and you provided good-quality training, so that teachers and teaching assistants would know exactly what to do. For example, you introduced a new system for teaching phonics (letters and the sounds that they make). Everybody knows their role, so learning in the first session of the day is productive for all.

In addition to transforming learning, you have changed the culture in the school. All the parents I spoke to, all the pupils I met and all the staff who responded to

Ofsted's confidential online survey commented positively on the impact of your work. Everybody talks about what a good place Moorings Way is to work or learn. Parents appreciate the friendly, family atmosphere. They like the way you listen to them and provide regular information about how well their child is doing. The vast majority believe that the school is well led and managed and know that if they need to ask anything they will get a clear response.

Although you know how much you have achieved in a relatively short space of time, you are not complacent. You provided me with a clear list of things that you still want to improve. These include: developing the outdoor spaces so that more pupils have access to the forest school part of the site; closing further the gaps between the performance of disadvantaged pupils in reading and mathematics; and developing leadership skills in a wider group of the staff so that more of them can be involved in managing aspects of the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's work to ensure that pupils remain safe at all times is good. The office staff ensure that no one enters the site without their identity being thoroughly checked. They also help you with carrying out robust checks on the suitability of staff and governors working with pupils. The site is secure, well maintained and free from hazards. Pupils are supervised closely as they move between lessons and playtimes. The lunch hall is not only a safe space, it is a place where adults reinforce important aspects of learning while the pupils are lining up to collect their food.

Staff have been suitably trained to detect signs of pupils who are at risk. They have completed online training designed to help them keep children safe. You have ensured they all understand their duties with regard to preventing children from being exposed to extremism or radicalisation. You keep good records of all the training they have completed. Appropriate safeguards are in place when pupils are learning with computers. These rigorous procedures apply equally to the children in Reception, even though they learn through play more regularly.

Inspection findings

- You are in the process of creating a thriving learning community. There is a genuine sense of excitement among the pupils all the time. You have set high expectations of what they can all achieve and you tolerate no excuses for poor performance.
- The school's evaluation of its own performance is particularly strong. With the governors and the local authority you have rightly concluded that there are some aspects which still need to improve. You also judge correctly that teaching is often outstanding and that the behaviour of students is regularly exemplary.
- Teaching is improving all the time. This is due to the robust systems for performance management. Teachers benefit, however, from complementary, strong coaching, mentoring and training. You set out clear expectations for them and, as a result, practice is consistent across

all classes and year groups. For example, in Year 1 all pupils were learning about Grace Darling. The teachers had created collaboratively a wide range of tasks so that all pupils were able to understand her story. Similarly, all pupils in Year 2 were learning to use their creativity in story writing, with the film version of the Wizard of Oz as a spark for their imagination.

- Leaders are supported professionally by a strong board of governors. All records of governors' work are clear and show that they hold the team accountable for all aspects of the school's work. Governors meet frequently but are reviewing this now that the school is settling well under your leadership.
- The local authority has also provided good-quality support for you in your first headship. They have provided direct support through an established school review process. Your education officer has enabled work with other schools locally, and has supported you in seeking guidance from other, more-experienced headteachers. The school belongs to a local cluster of schools and you have sensibly used this to check, for example, that the new system of assessment compares favourably with those developing in other schools.
- You provided strong evidence that the new system is the outcome of some astute thinking. You showed me how you have based it clearly on the standards expected of pupils at each age in the new national curriculum. You also showed me how you are tracking how well each child is doing against this framework. Helpfully, you were able to show me how the new system has brought into sharp focus some gaps in pupils' mathematical knowledge. Rightly, you are using this good-quality information to ensure that teachers fill these gaps, so that all pupils have developed mastery of each topic by the end of Key Stage 1. We agreed that pupils need some more training on how to understand this system so that they know what else they need to do to improve.
- The high-quality work you have undertaken with the staff to improve their skills is having a good impact on pupils' achievement. Outcomes are rising quickly and are on target to be higher than in 2015. In particular, you provided strong evidence that the high-intensity work on phonics will reverse the weaker results in 2015.
- Teaching assistants make a significant contribution to this improving picture in phonics. All adults take part in teaching phonics and you have ensured that all have benefited from effective training to support this aspect of their work. Your arrangements for teaching phonics mean that all pupils are able to make quick progress through the lessons.
- The effective teaching seen in English, reading and writing, and mathematics is repeated in all aspects of the curriculum. Pupils learn science well. Teachers make good use of the shoreline, welly walks and the forest school part of the site, to deepen pupils' growing understanding of the world. The 'bug hotel' is an exciting addition to the school's resources.
- Pupils also have ample opportunities to develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. They play and learn together well, mixing naturally and sharing toys, games and activities admirably. They have a clear

sense of right and wrong appropriate to their age and stage of life. They follow the school's simple rules and like to earn rewards for good behaviour. Many display strong artistic skills, which are put to good use to support their learning.

- Pupils conduct themselves well. Behaviour in lessons is outstanding. The tiny minority of pupils who need help to manage their behaviour are treated sensitively and with great skill. Consequently, there are no exclusions from the school. It is a happy and harmonious community where pupils from a wide and diverse range of backgrounds get on admirably. This is excellent preparation for life in modern Britain.
- Now that the school is operating effectively, you have been able to concentrate your efforts on the remaining areas in need of improvement. We agreed that historically the gaps between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in reading and mathematics need to close further. You have identified accurately that a higher proportion of girls than boys achieved a good level of development in 2015 at the end of Reception.
- The new assessment system is helping you to monitor how fast these gaps are closing. You hold teachers to account for the progress of each pupil in their class through regular meetings. You have also set appropriate checking points in the school's improvement plan to ensure that the pace of progress is maintained. You have also set ambitious targets to increase the aspiration of each child. Consequently teachers are challenged to coax the best from them all.
- The school is now at the point where the tight systems of control can be seen to have worked. Progress is good. You recognise that the next stage of the school's development depends on more members of staff taking responsibility for aspects of its work. You are already distributing more widely some leadership functions.
- With the support of the governors and the local authority, you are planning to extend leadership training to more staff. This will enable you to delegate appropriately some management activities. As the school is set to expand, you will be able, therefore, to maintain the high-quality standards you have created in a short space of time.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all parents understand the new assessment system, and that all pupils understand how well they are progressing and what they need to do to achieve the standards expected for their age
- gaps continue to close between the performance of disadvantaged pupils and others in reading and mathematics, and boys and girls in the early years
- leadership skills continue to increase across the whole staff so that more of them take on management roles where they lead effectively.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Portsmouth City Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Simon Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and your deputy headteacher several times during the day. I also met the office and finance manager. I met a range of parents informally at the school gate and considered responses parents had posted to Ofsted's confidential online survey Parent View. I met with the governors and with Portsmouth City Council's education adviser. You led me on a tour of the school and we jointly observed learning in all year groups. I considered a range of the school's documentation, including its safeguarding checks, information about pupils' achievement, and checks on the quality of teaching. I also analysed responses to Ofsted's online, confidential staff survey. No pupils had been able to respond to the pupil survey provided by Ofsted, but I spoke with pupils in lessons.