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Paula Fewtrell  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Fewtrell

### **Short inspection of St Margaret's Infant School**

Following my visit to the school on 22 March 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 July 2011.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

Leaders have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your leadership has engendered a strong bond between staff, all of whom continually seek ways to improve the education pupils receive at the school. You have instilled a culture where staff feel valued. You provide them with equal opportunities to develop their professional skills and to make a contribution to school improvement. Subsequently, staff are committed to your aspirations for the school and are ambitious for pupils to achieve well.

You have ensured that the number of pupils who achieve the standards expected for their age has improved year-on-year. Pupils enter the school with knowledge, skills and understanding that are generally below typical for children of their age. By the time they leave the school, a high proportion of pupils are working at standards expected for their age. The proportions of pupils who reached the highest levels of achievement in reading, writing and mathematics were at least equal to the national averages in 2015. This is because pupils across the school make at least expected progress from their different starting points and many pupils make accelerated progress. This progress is achieved because staff use assessment information well to ensure that learning activities are well-matched to pupils' needs.

You know what needs to be accomplished to make the school even better and lose no time in trying to address areas for improvement. The school development plan is closely linked to leaders' evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. However, the plan lacks milestones on which to measure the progress that leaders are making towards improvement. You are supported well by a positive team of staff that implements changes effectively. For example, the introduction of a new programme to help develop pupils' early reading skills has improved the quality of teaching in phonics (the sounds that letters make). As a result, the proportion of pupils who reach the expected standards in phonics by the end of Year 1 is well above the national average.

You and your staff have worked dutifully to meet the recommendations from the previous inspection in July 2011. There has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching since then. This is because you rigorously monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and support all adults to improve their practice. You have provided high-quality training to improve the staff's skills. You have developed the role of subject leaders, provided personalised coaching for staff, resourced focused training for newly qualified teachers and welcomed support from the local authority early years adviser.

Throughout the school, teachers and support staff use assessment information well, especially in writing, to challenge the vast majority of pupils, including the most able. The effectiveness of leadership has been strengthened because responsibilities for steering subjects and areas for improvement have been shared with emerging middle leaders. Middle leaders support your senior leaders with increasing confidence. They have assisted you in raising the quality of teaching because they are fully involved in monitoring and evaluating the performance of colleagues.

The school has invested in technology so that all pupils now have access to interactive whiteboards. For example, during this inspection, pupils in Reception used an art programme to develop their fine motor skills and Year 1 pupils demonstrated how to use a number line to subtract one number from a larger one. Homework is supported through online programmes in mathematics and reading. A parent expressed their views about this initiative by stating, 'The school recently introduced an online book reading system and my daughter has found this very enjoyable because it combines her love of books with her enthusiasm for computers.'

You have worked hard to help pupils to gain a greater awareness of cultural diversity. All pupils recently participated in a cross-phase themed week based on different countries. Pupils learned about the history, geography and cultural traditions of countries around the world. During this visit, pupils animatedly told me about the Amazon rainforest and others about how water in Africa sometimes needs to be purified to make it safe to drink. Displays around the school highlight the rich opportunities pupils have to learn about other cultures, which was an area for improvement at the last inspection.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

School leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. Staff are acutely aware of their duty to protect pupils and know the school's procedures extremely well. Governors take their responsibility to protect pupils very seriously and monitor the strength of safeguarding throughout the school well.

Leaders seek support and external advice when they need it. They respond to concerns from parents in a timely and thorough way. One parent stated, 'The staff are very approachable at the end of the day to raise any concerns and deal with them accordingly.' Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe. Even the youngest pupils know that they can ask for 'Bubble Time' if they are worried about anything. They collectively state that adults will set aside time to talk with them and help to resolve problems they might have. Pupils feel safe because they are shrouded in a culture of vigilance and cared for by staff who know them well.

## **Inspection findings**

- Leaders are ambitious for all groups of learners, especially for pupils who are disadvantaged. You have taken account of the fact that the standards expected by the end of each academic year have risen. Parents have appreciated the valuable information you have provided. One parent stated, 'The new curriculum was explained well to parents and reports are reader friendly – it is easy to interpret progress and achievement.'
- Middle leaders are taking increasing responsibility to forge improved standards in the subjects they are responsible for. They are undertaking leadership training to help them improve their ability to impact on the strategic development of the whole school. Senior leaders are rightly keen for these enthusiastic, emerging leaders to embed their roles so that they are able to accelerate school improvement, especially in mathematics.
- Staff understand and consistently apply the school's expectations regarding appropriate behaviour and conduct. As a result, pupils know what is expected of them and respond to guidance from staff extremely well. Pupils who find it difficult to manage their behaviour are well supported because leaders seek external support to ensure that their needs are met. As a result, pupils are more able to access learning.
- Pupils are caring and empathetic towards each other. They are polite and demonstrate good manners because they are taught to respect each other, and all staff model appropriate behaviour.
- Pupils are very keen to learn and all of them join in lessons enthusiastically. For example, a large group of children in Nursery joyfully joined in with the class teacher as she shared the story of 'The three little pigs'. Pupils participate, share ideas and answer questions confidently because the learning culture is safe and trusting. They are resilient when staff give them feedback on how to improve their work. Pupils feel that learning is one of the best things about their school. One pupil exclaimed, 'I think learning is awesome!'

- Pupils enjoy being given responsibilities such as being members of the school council or the eco-school committee or being part of the rights-respecting committee. Pupils learn how to express their views confidently and these opportunities provide them with valuable skills for the future.
- The impact of additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils is analysed thoroughly to make sure that interventions are making a difference and improving these pupils' progress; their needs are well met. As a result, the achievement gap between this group and their peers is narrowing rapidly. Their achievement by the end of Key Stage 1 compares favourably with other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. There has been a sharp upward trend in their achievement in the early years and in the proportions reaching the expected standards in phonics. Current performance information shows that the gaps continue to close: over 90% of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding are working at the expected standard for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders are not complacent. The achievement of this group of pupils continues to be a priority but leaders know that more work needs to be done for a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils to reach the highest levels of attainment.
- Outcomes are strong overall. The proportion of pupils who achieve the expected standards for their age is well above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 1. The proportion of pupils who reach the highest levels is equal to national average in mathematics and a little above in reading and writing. However, you recognise that this could be improved on further as a very high number of pupils are already, half-way through the academic year, working at the expected levels.
- Pupils are taught phonics highly effectively and leaders are confident that the already high level of achievement will be improved on this year. Pupils are able to spell difficult words such as 'temperature' and 'exploration' confidently and accurately and to use new words in sentences. They are encouraged to use these words in sentences to show that they understand their meaning. Work in books shows that pupils are taught to use exciting vocabulary and how to spell less common words more accurately, especially by more-able pupils. More-able pupils in early years receive additional support to focus on sustained writing and accurate use of punctuation.
- Pupils' books show that they can respond to mathematical challenges and are beginning to use a range of strategies to solve problems. Pupils in Key Stage 1 are making good progress in mathematics and a large proportion of pupils are already working at the level expected for their age. Staff are grappling with the changes to the mathematics curriculum and, as yet, there is limited evidence that pupils in Years 1 and 2 are being challenged to reach the highest levels in mathematics through opportunities to practise and deepen their understanding in a wide variety of ways. Leaders are working hard to ensure that assessment is accurate, so that planned lessons meet pupils' needs. You have rightly focused on mathematics as an area for continued improvement. Your recent focus on mathematics in the early years has paid dividends by generating better outcomes for children's number work and in their understanding of shape, space and measure.

- The most-able pupils are challenged because work is closely matched to their needs, particularly in writing. For instance, more-able pupils write at length and use a range of complex sentences, enhanced by rich vocabulary and precise punctuation. One parent commented on the school's focus on challenging their child by stating, 'There are extended enrichment opportunities for her as an able writer and this has boosted her self-esteem and confidence.'
- The early years leader is confident and knowledgeable in her role because she has been supported well by the local authority to improve the provision. The environment is bright and stimulating and encourages children to enjoy all areas of learning. Activities are closely linked to all children's needs, with disadvantaged children receiving additional support to help them to achieve. Leaders have worked hard to check that boys achieve as well as girls, particularly in their writing. As a result, this gap in achievement is closing. The number of children who reach a good level of development by the end of the early years has improved in line with national figures. Historically, however, some groups of children, including those who are disadvantaged, have achieved less well than their peers. You are justifiably ambitious for all children to have the very best start to their education. Although outcomes are predicted to rise in 2016 for all groups of children overall, you appreciate the importance of increasing the proportion of children reaching the expected level of achievement for their age by the time they leave the early years.
- Parents are extremely positive about the school and, in particular, the support provided for pupils with special educational needs. One parent expressed this view by saying, 'The teaching staff are supporting my son to be the best he can be.' Parents especially value the start their children make in Nursery and are complimentary about the progress their children make both academically and personally. They believe the relationship between staff and their children is strong and that they are cared for well.
- Leaders have worked hard to increase the proportion of pupils who attend school every day. You use the support of the attendance advisory practitioner to help you. You provide rewards for pupils who attend well. Moreover, you provide exciting lessons and experiences to encourage pupils to come to school. You have taken robust action with regard to poor attendance such as requiring parents to come to 'attendance clinics' if their child is absent from school on too often. The school's family liaison officer has improved the attendance of pupils who miss too much schooling. Attendance continues to be above the national average for primary schools and pupils are rarely late.
- Governors add to the capacity of the school to improve further. They seek information for themselves and are visible around the school. They are available to parents, pupils and staff. They hold leaders to account for the progress the school is making. They find out information for themselves to underpin the information provided for them by school leaders. Governors are committed to the school and to the protection of children from harm.

- You have been open to support offered to the school by the local authority and you say that the support has made a positive difference. You have particularly welcomed support and collaboration with other schools. Staff have been able to share pupils' work to make sure that their judgements about how well pupils are doing are secure.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the proportion of children reaching expected standards by the end of the early years continues to rise, so that they have the very best possible start to their education
- more pupils reach the highest levels of attainment, particularly those who are disadvantaged
- pupils are given more time to practice and deepen their understanding of mathematics in a wide variety of ways so that they are able to reach the highest levels of achievement
- middle leaders are given increased opportunities to support and impact on continued school improvement, especially in mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Abigail Birch  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I visited classes in all years with you. I met with you, the deputy headteacher, who is also the special educational needs coordinator, one of the early years' leaders and three members of the governing body. I also met with a group of staff who represented a breadth of roles within the school. I scrutinised a range of pupils' work. I took account of 29 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and to written comments of 29 parents. I also spoke to a number of parents at the start of the school day. I met pupils formally and talked to them when I visited lessons. I took account of the 26 responses to the voluntary staff survey. I analysed a wide range of the school's documentation, including the school improvement plan, school policies, information about pupils' achievement, and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. I also discussed your own evaluation of the effectiveness of the school with you.