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Mrs Sarah Timlin
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Timlin

Short inspection of Hankham Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 4 May 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 February 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since taking up your post in April 2015, you have worked with energy and a clear focus to arrest a decline in standards. In a relatively short period of time, your actions have improved the quality of teaching and had a good impact in addressing the legacy of underachievement seen in recent years.

In changing the leadership and management structure of the school, you have ensured that leaders at all levels have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, so that they are having a greater impact on the progress pupils make.

Teachers are much more focused on providing high-quality teaching, and their expectations have risen. Because of this, pupils are being challenged appropriately in classrooms and making more rapid progress than in the recent past.

Your working partnerships with members of the governing body have been productive. Their collective support has been key to moving the school forward. Many changes, including changes in teaching and support staff, the opening of a new school building, improvements to site security and the safeguarding of pupils, the introduction of a robust performance management system, and new systems to monitor the progress of pupils have all been managed well. Staff and most parents

have also been very supportive, although it is clear that some parents are concerned about such a rapid pace of change in this small village school.

Pupils enjoy coming to school because they feel safe and it's 'a fun place to be'. They told me that everyone is friendly, adults look after them well, and that they enjoy learning. They also enjoy the extra-curricular sports clubs and educational visits, including a recent visit to the Science Museum in London. Older pupils were very clear that behaviour is now much better, especially in classrooms. Younger pupils told me that they enjoy mathematics and phonics, especially the phonics 'games' they play every day.

During my visits to classrooms, I found that relationships between staff and pupils are good. There was a sense of purpose to everything I saw and pupils were keen to show me their work and explain what they were doing. In some lessons, pupils were less clear about what they were learning, although they were able to explain confidently what they needed to do to complete the tasks they had been set. During these visits and at a subsequent meeting I held with teachers to discuss the quality of pupils' work, it was clear to me that the level of challenge offered to pupils is good and most are now making good or better progress.

At the time of the last inspection, the inspector recognised the many strengths of the school, including high expectations, effective governance, good relationships with parents and rising attainment. The inspector also identified a need to ensure better progress in writing and that the school work harder at sharing the features of high-quality teaching so that more was judged to be outstanding. Leaders have addressed these issues successfully, although further improving the quality of teaching is an ongoing aspiration for the school.

Since the last inspection, school leaders have continued the important process of self-evaluation in order to identify the most important priorities to improve the school. Since you joined the school, your own work to audit the strengths and identify the areas that require improvement has been key to arresting the decline in standards in teaching, learning and assessment, and in outcomes for pupils. You were able to explain the strengths as well as the areas that need to be developed. These include ensuring that outcomes for boys improve to be more similar to those of girls. We also agreed that despite recent progress, outcomes for pupils capable of achieving at higher levels in both key stages 1 and 2 need to improve further.

Safeguarding is effective.

The safety of children is given top priority. Policies and systems are robust. Day-to-day procedures are given high importance and staff are vigilant when ensuring that children are safe. Recent changes to site security have struck a sensible balance when considering access to the school. The health and safety of pupils and staff have also had a high priority during recent building work.

Children are taught how to stay safe when using the internet. They know what to do if the fire alarm sounds. During my formal discussion with a group of pupils, they told me that they feel safe in school and are happy that the school now has fences and gates that are closed and locked. Staff, who are trained in safeguarding at levels appropriate to their responsibilities, explained their work well in keeping children safe at the school. All of the parents I talked to during my visit told me that they feel their children are safe at school.

Inspection findings

- You lead the school very well. In a short period of time, you have stemmed the decline in standards. You have created the capacity for school leaders to have more impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning; this is leading to better outcomes for pupils.
- Governors know the school well and offer you good support in making the changes required to improve the school. They also offer you a good degree of challenge, not least in their need to ensure that the changes you have made are having the impact required.
- Self-evaluation and development planning are sound, but now need refining to focus even more sharply on the aspects required to improve the school. Your partnership with the local authority will help with this and there are already plans in place to further review priorities in the near future.
- Recently introduced systems to track the progress of pupils and monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are having a good impact on improving classroom practice. Because of this, staff are much more aware of what they need to do to improve and governors are much better informed about the quality of teaching and the progress pupils are making.
- The introduction of a more rigorous staff appraisal system has also had a good impact on the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils. Staff benefit from a range of professional development opportunities closely linked to training needs.
- Children do well in the early years, making good progress from their different starting points. Learning opportunities are matched closely to each child's needs. Because of the good quality of provision, most children are ready for the greater demands of the Year 1 curriculum by the end of their Reception Year.
- The school's provision for phonics is improving. The introduction of a phonics leader and focused training for staff ensured that the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in Year 1 nearly doubled last year, leaving the school well placed when compared with other schools nationally.
- Outcomes in reading and writing in both key stages 1 and 2 have not been as strong as they should be in recent years. Outcomes in mathematics are slightly stronger, but still need to improve. However, recent changes in the quality of teaching and learning have ensured that pupils are now making much more rapid progress in all year groups and in all subjects, especially the most-able pupils.

- In recent years, the achievements of boys have been lower than those of girls. Leaders are addressing this situation and have already made significant changes to the curriculum and the way boys are challenged in lessons. Because of this, the gaps in attainment between boys and girls are closing, although significant differences in cohort numbers (for instance, currently there are only three boys in a cohort of 18 pupils in Year 6), make meaningful comparisons difficult.
- Leaders, including governors, have rightly identified disadvantaged pupils as a high priority and ensure that the improvements in teaching seen this year have boosted the progress of this group. These pupils and those with special educational needs or disability now do well and are making good progress.
- Behaviour in classrooms and around the school is good. A new behaviour policy which rewards pupils who conduct themselves well is used consistently across the school. Pupils and staff report that behaviour is much improved, especially in classrooms, where poor behaviour rarely impacts on learning.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. Most attend well and effective work has been undertaken to support those, notably pupils with special educational needs, who attended less well in the past. They enjoy the different topics they study and are pleased with the level of care and guidance that staff offer them. During the inspection, it was clear that pastoral care and pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development are well provided for. When asked, pupils found it hard to think of anything of real consequence that would improve the school.
- The work of the local authority has been instrumental in ensuring that the school continues to provide a good standard of education. It has ensured that school leaders, governors and staff have received appropriate support and guidance in order to stabilise the school when a number of important changes have taken place, including substantial building work and successive changes in school leadership. Partnerships are strong. The capacity for further rapid improvement is good.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers get even better at motivating and engaging boys in their learning, so that the achievement of boys improves and matches more closely the outcomes of girls
- expectations for pupils capable of achieving at higher levels continue to rise, so that the most able achieve better outcomes.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for East Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Clive Close

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, teachers, pupils and the chair of the governing body, accompanied by two other governors. I also met a representative of the local authority. You accompanied me as I visited all classrooms, talking to pupils about their learning and looking at the quality of their work. I observed pupils' behaviour in and around the school. I spoke to parents at the beginning of the day and took into account the 66 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also took into account of the 49 free-text responses submitted by parents. I analysed a wide range of documentation, including information about the progress and achievements of pupils, your own self-evaluation, the school development plan, minutes of governors' meetings and records of visits by the local authority. I also checked the safeguarding policy, including records and procedures aimed at helping to keep pupils safe.