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Mrs Lynda Downes
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Downes

Short inspection of Sandling Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 June 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The previous inspection judged all aspects of the school to be good and made particular mention of leaders' high aspirations, high pupil attainment and positive behaviour. These continue to be strong. You have developed an effective leadership team with clear roles, responsibilities and expertise. You provide clarity of purpose and put the pupils at the heart of everything you do. However, it is not only the leaders who have high ambition. Parents, pupils and staff are overwhelmingly positive about the school. All staff who responded to the online survey believe that the school provides a calm, orderly and aspirational place for pupils. Leaders, staff and pupils of Sandling School demonstrate in practice the school motto, 'We learn together. We have fun together. We achieve together.'

Standards of behaviour and academic achievement continue to be high across the school and have improved in many aspects since the last inspection. As well as high standards, particularly in reading and writing at the end of key stages 1 and 2, there has been a sharp jump in the proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of reception and in the proportion who achieve well in the Year 1 phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) screening check. The pupils are well prepared to take the next steps in their education.

The previous inspection identified some areas for improvement. These included: ensuring that all teaching is consistently good across the school; making the teaching of reading more inspiring; enhancing support for pupils with special

educational needs or disability; helping pupils understand what they are aiming to learn in mathematics and improving the quality of displays. You and your staff have focused very effectively on all of these priorities, and improvements have been achieved in all of them.

The school is vibrant with displays which support learning and celebrate pupils' achievement in many different subjects. Teaching and learning are now strong throughout the school. Some relative weaknesses in teaching have been resolved, albeit fairly recently, and you are making sure that pupils who have fallen a little behind are receiving high-quality teaching and are catching up now in leaps and bounds. Pupils speak confidently and enthusiastically about the revamped library and their individual reading choices. All pupils are well supported and provision for those who have special educational needs or disability has been reviewed and improved. Pupils are very clear about what they are learning and are supported very effectively so that they improve their work quickly.

Your evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is accurate, and well founded on a careful analysis of assessment information and surveys of parents', pupils' and staffs' views. You have identified that achievement in mathematics is weaker than reading and writing and you are addressing this as a high priority so that the gaps between mathematics and reading and writing are beginning to close. Raising the achievement and attendance of disadvantaged pupils is also high on the school's priorities. Although the gaps between these pupils' attainment and that of others are closing, you are fully aware that there is more to do to ensure that this group of pupils achieve as well as they possibly can.

Safeguarding is effective.

All of the parents, staff and pupils who responded to the surveys say that pupils are safe and happy in school.

Policies and procedures to ensure the safety of pupils are comprehensive and up to date. Rigorous checks and training are carried out to make sure that all staff, trainee teachers and volunteers are suitable to work with children and know the school's procedures. Three members of staff are trained as safeguarding leaders and there is always at least one of these colleagues in school any at time. All other staff are trained and updated regularly on safeguarding issues, including receiving specific child protection newsletters from you. Staff received comprehensive training on child protection, encompassing the dangers of extremism, on the day before this inspection. A staff room noticeboard is also specifically designated for information about safeguarding. The site is secure and visitors are checked carefully. Risk assessments are carried out rigorously and the governors fulfil their responsibilities conscientiously. The safeguarding governor and you carry out regular, comprehensive safeguarding and health and safety reviews. Any issues are identified, action taken and checked.

Parents, pupils and staff are confident that behaviour is good and well managed. Bullying is extremely rare and dealt with effectively. Attendance is well above the national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those with education

and health care plans is improving and is currently at least at the national average for the same group of pupils. All potentially vulnerable pupils are carefully tracked and the school colleagues work alongside parents to support the pupils' attendance and well-being in school. Relationships throughout the school are very positive and pupils are polite, friendly and keen to learn.

Inspection findings

- You and your leaders make your expectations clear and support your staff to improve their practice. As a result, the staff are overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of the school. They are proud to belong to the school, feel well supported and share high expectations of learning, behaviour and attitudes.
- There have been a number of changes in the governing body over the past few years. The school has seen this as both a challenge and an opportunity and you have recruited new governors who contribute a range of useful skills and expertise.
- Leaders' self-evaluation is accurate and the improvement priorities are well founded on accurate analysis of the school's strengths and relative weaknesses.
- The school improvement plan is sharply focused and appropriate. Some targets, particularly around attendance, behaviour and well-being, are not easily measurable, making it harder to check if improvements are happening. The school already gathers and analyses appropriate information so that this could easily be remedied.
- You carefully and quickly introduced a new assessment system in tandem with the revised curriculum. As a result, staff are increasingly confident about identifying how well pupils are achieving and acting quickly to address the needs of those who fall behind.
- The achievement of disadvantaged pupils is a high priority for the school and their progress is tracked very carefully. However, caution is required when looking at the data for this group and for pupils who have special educational needs or disability because of the small numbers.
- The school can show where action to increase attendance, improve well-being or access to enrichment opportunities and interventions has meant that disadvantaged pupils make at least expected and often better progress. Last year this group progressed as well as others in the early years and performed as well in the Year 1 phonics screening check. Although they now do better, their typically lower starting points mean that, for gaps in attainment to close with other pupils, there is a need for them to make accelerated progress. Equally, their attendance, although improved, needs to rise at a faster rate for it to be as good as that of other pupils.
- Achievement in mathematics is another key priority for improvement in the school this year because standards and progress in mathematics have been lower than the very high achievements in reading and writing. You have raised the profile and focused attention on this issue for the school. For example, all teachers have a performance management target linked to pupils' achievement in mathematics. Strong leadership of mathematics is now helping to develop understanding, build confidence and enable staff to

support pupils' learning. There has been a shift in emphasis and an expectation that problem solving and reasoning are included in everyday mathematics. This approach is evident in the pupils' books as well as in lessons.

- During the visit we saw some very engaging activities based on real life. For example, older pupils were using photographs of Olympic athletes to estimate and measure angles. In other classes, pupils were using the results of their skipping challenge to translate the evidence into graphs and were thinking about which sort of graph would best suit the information gathered. There was lots of mathematical discussion in these classes and in other classes and a strong whole-school focus on encouraging pupils to explain their thinking and to routinely ask: "Why?" Occasionally, when pupils complete activities in reading and mathematics, they do not move on to more challenging work.
- Pupils are very aware of how they can improve their work, what they are aiming to do and how to get there because of the good feedback they get and their enthusiasm to improve.
- Weaker teaching in the past has left a little bit of underachievement which the school identified quickly and is effectively addressing. Now teaching is strong across the school. Teachers plan well together to make sure the learning is appropriate to meet the needs and the interests of the pupils. The books show that pupils are learning in some depth across a good range of subjects.
- There are some good examples of pupils' achievements in different subjects in books and on display. This includes some lovely sunflower pictures and some interesting use of technology by both staff and pupils. Pupils say they enjoy learning, teachers help and challenge them to do their best. Almost all the parents agree that their children are well taught.
- The library is a lively resource which is used well. Year 6 pupils enjoy access to the top shelf of books, which, being more suitable for older pupils, are not available to the other pupils. Staff are keen to explore how things can be improved and a group of boys piloting a new approach to reading lessons were informative, enthusiastic and keen to discuss how this is helping them enjoy reading more.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and their children's experiences, both personal and academic. Very high proportions strongly agree that pupils are well taught, make good progress, behave well, are safe and happy and that leadership and management are good. How well leaders respond to parental concerns was a slightly less positive aspect of the survey.
- The pupils were keen to start school on the first day after the half-term holidays. They say they enjoy school and show in lessons, and in their books, that they are keen to do well. They cooperate well, willingly explain their ideas and their reasoning and generally listen with respect to each other's contributions. They are confident learners who take a pride in their work. They experience activities to develop their own well-being, confidence, respect for others and their understanding of values and beliefs.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- attainment and the rate of progress in mathematics continue to improve so that achievement in mathematics matches the very high standards achieved in reading and writing
- the sharp focus on disadvantaged pupils is maintained so that their attainment, progress and attendance improve to match their classmates.

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

Yours sincerely

Sheena MacDonald
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your senior leaders, the mathematics leader, the family liaison officer, the chair of the governing body and the safeguarding governor. An improvement advisor from the local authority joined us for the feedback meeting. You and I visited all of the year groups in key stages 1 and 2 during the day to observe the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in mathematics. We also looked at the pupils' books, including some from disadvantaged pupils. I took account of 16 staff questionnaires, 44 responses to the Ofsted online survey Parent View and 70 responses to the pupil questionnaire. I also looked at a recent school survey of parents' views. I spoke to a number of parents at the start of the school day. I had lunch with pupils and met with a group of key stage 2 boys in the library to talk about reading. I looked at a range of the school's documentation, including information about pupils' achievement, attendance, safeguarding checks, policies, and procedures. I also looked at, and discussed with you, the evaluation of the school's effectiveness and the current improvement plans.