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Mrs Katarzyna Blake
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Blake

Short inspection of Handford Hall Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 14 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 November 2010.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained and further developed the high quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Handford Hall Primary is a school that is a purposeful place for children to learn, underpinned by a strong ethos and your core values, 'Achieve, Believe and Celebrate'. You, other leaders and your staff are constantly striving to be even better. Pupils love coming to school, are proud and exceptionally motivated to learn and achieve. Pupils enjoy the many trips and special days that you organise for them. One pupil said she could not wait for the next art day because the theme was going to be a surprise and she 'just loved them'.

A significant proportion of pupils enter your school with little or no knowledge of the English language. You address the challenge of the high number of pupils who start and leave during the school year extremely well by ensuring that structures and processes are firmly in place to help pupils settle quickly, learn English and make good progress in their learning. You balance the structure and routines your pupils require with a variety of creative experiences. As a result, pupils become motivated and independent learners who want to excel. This year, the proportion of pupils in Year 6 who reach attainment standards in reading, writing and mathematics is set to rise to close to the national expectations for their age. Progress measures are above expected and most pupils make excellent progress from low starting points.

Pupils who have special educational needs or disability are provided with the same opportunities to excel. Through your careful and thoughtful assessment of individual needs, you provide practical solutions that help these pupils to be independent in their learning. As a result, pupils who have special educational needs or disability are making exceptional progress both personally and academically. Parents spoken to are very positive about the school, particularly those with pupils who have specific needs.

Your provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is exemplary. Pupils willingly take roles of responsibility especially when helping others to learn to read through your mentoring 'duolog' system. Pupils' appreciation and respect for each other and adults is evident across the school.

Senior leaders and middle leaders talk passionately about their work and are able to provide evidence to show that they are continually improving. They are focused on raising standards further. If steps taken to make improvements are not working, they think again and try new approaches with the support of all staff. You are aware that some of the monitoring of the progress that pupils make in the wider curriculum is not as precise as in English and mathematics. You are all taking the correct actions to make sure that pupils' achievement continues to rise.

Attainment at key stage 2 is not yet in line with national averages, but is improving. Pupils make significant progress in reading, writing and mathematics from key stage 1 to the end of Year 6. You have identified that by the end of key stage 1, some pupils could achieve even more, especially if they have been with you since the start of their school life. Your chosen approach to the teaching of phonics is having significant impact on developing secure reading skills. In 2015, pupils achieved in line with national expectations. Pupils are on track to achieve above the national expectations for their age in the Year 1 phonics screening check this year.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's safeguarding policies and procedures meet current requirements. Recording systems are fully in place for the recruitment of staff. Leaders and governors are rigorous in ensuring that the necessary recruitment checks have been carried out effectively. Documents and school records are meticulously kept.

Leaders and governors ensure that staff are well informed and trained about new guidance including, for example, the 'Prevent' duty. Staff receive regular training both formally and through regular staff updates, and are suitably qualified and confident to implement the school's policies.

Pupils who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, together with those spoken to during the inspection, agree that they feel safe. They have someone to talk to if they are concerned. Parents overwhelmingly agreed that their children are kept safe in the school. Pupils are highly confident that the adults will deal well with conflict or any potential bullying situations should they ever arise. Pupils are adamant that bullying does not occur at the school because they are taught how to keep themselves safe and respect others through school assemblies.

Inspection findings

- At the previous inspection, inspectors praised the school for many aspects of its work, especially the highly effective spiritual, moral, social and cultural education the pupils receive. This has been sustained and remains a core strength. As school leaders, you hold a strong belief that every pupil is an individual who can succeed, irrespective of their starting point. You and your staff provide the care, guidance and support pupils require so they can excel.
- In all conversations with you, other leaders, governors and staff, ambition for improvement and high expectations for pupils' achievement were communicated strongly. Leaders are passionate about their areas of responsibility. Leaders of subjects other than English and mathematics are increasingly able to support their views with clear evidence of the impact of their work on the progress pupils are making.
- Governors fulfil their responsibilities to support the school and ensure that leaders are held to account. Systems are in place to appraise the performance of staff and leaders. Governors visit the school regularly to assure themselves of the accuracy and quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They talk to leaders and pupils as well as looking at the work in pupils' books. Governors are strategic and have clear plans in place to continue and sustain school improvement.
- You are effectively addressing the need to engage boys in their learning so they can achieve even more, particularly in writing. From the work seen in books, boys are engaging in the topics that link with other subjects well, such as science. Their work shows that they are persevering and challenging themselves to produce work of a better standard. As a result, boys are making better progress and the standard of their writing is greatly improved.
- Although children start the school with skills and abilities in communication, literacy and numeracy that are well below those expected for their age, you have ensured that this barrier is addressed swiftly and effectively. Children in the early years are given the opportunity to develop their skills quickly. The outside areas are used effectively to support children's reading and number work. Consequently, children leave Reception with a good level of development that is broadly in line with national expectations for their age. You recognise that attainment in the early years can be increased further by providing even more opportunities for children to develop precise handwriting and letter formation skills.
- School leaders have been successful in addressing the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. Lessons have clear objectives and you insist on the use of success criteria so every pupil knows how to achieve and be proud of their efforts.

- Every class makes use of the well-equipped computer suite. Pupils often use the suite more frequently to take their 'quiz'. Pupils challenge themselves by completing a quiz about the books they have read. One boy was highly delighted when he achieved his target of 100% accuracy for the last three books he had read. He proudly informed me about how much he enjoyed the books and the number of words he had read from each book.
- You have skilfully developed an interesting and challenging curriculum that is reflected in the lively displays and attractive resources around the school. You effectively link topics of work and provide many opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills as well as practising their knowledge and understanding in other subjects, such as science, history and geography. Pupils can easily talk about a wide range of lessons that they enjoy.
- You work closely with parents and consider carefully and thoughtfully the needs of your community and the many languages that are spoken at home. Trained staff are available to give families extra support when needed. You run additional sessions so parents can be involved in their children's learning. Of those parents who gave their views on the Parent View free-text service, all commented on how welcoming and caring the school is.
- You have already identified in your improvement plans that attainment in writing and mathematics has not reached the level expected nationally, even though the pupils at the school are making good and often better progress by the end of Year 6. You are rightly targeting the progress that pupils make in lower key stage 2, so that pupils consistently make the progress of which they are capable.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- middle leaders regularly monitor and evaluate the impact of the wider curriculum on the progress that pupils make
- children in the early years are provided with even more opportunities to develop and practise their handwriting, so they can make even better progress in writing
- they accelerate the progress of pupils in lower key stage 2, so that attainment rises by the end of Year 6.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, senior and middle leaders, representatives from the governing body, a representative of the local authority and a group of pupils. HMI spoke informally with pupils and parents. A range of documentation was scrutinised, including the school's own evaluation of its performance, school improvement plans, early years evaluation documents, and information about safeguarding and pupils' outcomes. All teachers were observed teaching and pupils' work was evaluated.