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Mrs Lauren Moore
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Dear Mrs Moore

Short inspection of Honington Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 24 May 2016 with Kim Pigram, Her Majesty's Inspector, 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 May 2011.

This school continues to be good.

Honington Primary has a well-deserved reputation as a friendly, welcoming and caring school, where all staff work very hard to ensure that pupils are happy and achieve well. In their written responses to the inspection survey, parents were overwhelmingly positive in their praise for the school, often singling out the quality of the school's pastoral care and support. This is vital because the school experiences an exceptionally high pupil turnover, with pupils of all ages arriving or leaving at different times of the year, some having already attended several different schools. Parents appreciate that, when they arrive from other schools, their children are helped to integrate quickly and settle happily. They say that everyone, from office reception to class teachers and assistants, is approachable and supportive. Home-school communication is excellent.

In the five years since its previous inspection, the school has successfully sustained high standards for children in the early years and pupils in key stage 1, although the high turnover of pupils in some cohorts caused an occasional dip in results. The school became an all-through primary in 2014, expanding with a smart new building to accommodate pupils in Years 5 and 6, and recording its first key stage 2 results in 2015. However, the outcomes for Year 6 pupils last year came as a shock because,

although standards were broadly in line with national figures, pupils had not made enough progress in reading, writing or mathematics, from their comparatively high starting points at the end of Year 2. Notwithstanding the fact that many pupils had not attended Honington for the duration of key stage 2, these results were not good enough, particularly in writing.

Prior to your appointment as headteacher, leaders and governors had been too complacent about the school's performance, because standards at key stage 1 and for children in early years have typically been high. In September, you immediately raised expectations and introduced a raft of changes to sharpen classroom teaching, particularly in key stage 2, and strengthen leadership and management at all levels. Staff and governors, several of whom have been at the school for a long time, are unequivocal that the school is far more effective than at the time of the previous inspection, and that improvements since September have been rapid.

In your school development plan, you have rightly identified the need to establish effective leadership at all levels, including governance, as a key priority. You have already made necessary changes to subject leadership by clarifying roles and empowering leaders to do their job. This has quickly built the school's leadership capacity and is starting to make the best use of the skills, energy and abilities of your staff and governors. Governors are now able to put the theory of their governor training into practice, and monitor the school's work more systematically. Governors have always been supportive, but they are now given the right information to be able to hold the school to account effectively.

Your swift and decisive action has addressed the weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment. Teachers have worked hard and have willingly embraced these necessary changes. Your systematic observations and work scrutinies show that teaching has improved and is consistently good. Some teaching is excellent.

Improving pupils' writing was identified as a key priority, and suitable steps have been taken to improve matters. Work in pupils' books and on display throughout the school shows that pupils' handwriting, presentation and extended writing have been radically improved over the last six months. Pupils have made a 'presentation pledge' and are expected to develop a cursive script, so that their writing is legible and fluent. The impact of this is impressive. Other strategies to improve pupils' extended writing are also having a positive impact on the quality, creativity and breadth of their writing for different audiences. During the visit, inspectors observed Year 3 pupils writing persuasive arguments to save the rhino and looked at excellent folk stories written by Year 4 pupils. In Year 6, pupils enjoy the 'creative café' on two afternoons each week, when they can let their imaginations fly, and can devote time to refining and editing their work to complete high-quality assignments. The most able pupils have the opportunity to produce exceptional work, sometimes based on challenging philosophical questions. However, extended writing highlights inaccuracy in pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar, which are weaknesses that have yet to be systematically rectified.

You remain understandably cautious about predicting good results in 2016 because of uncertainties about the assessment of the new tests, and because the Year 6 pupils have not always experienced consistently high-quality teaching at Honington or in their other schools.

The curriculum provides pupils with rich and varied educational experiences, and an appreciation of the wider world. This is endorsed by what parents say about the school. Two responses from parents illustrate this:

- One parent wrote: 'the school is fantastic at organising trips and events that tie in with the curriculum, the boys recently had a circus arrive on the playing field for a week and were able to join in on the evening performance, an experience they loved and it will stay with them'.
- Another commented that, 'having experienced many schools, Honington has by far stretched and encouraged my children's natural curiosity for the world. They arrive home talking of what they have learnt that day'.

In order to alleviate the difficulties presented by pupils' disrupted educational experiences, the school places due emphasis on promoting specific aspects of personal development. For example, pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning, be curious about the world around them and develop independence and resilience. This is evident in the way that pupils make use of resources in the classroom, such as 'working walls' and the 'word wise' vocabulary bank, to work things out for themselves when they can. Pupils routinely follow the 'next steps' provided in marking, and know that they can choose to join the focus group, with the teacher or the teaching assistant, when they get stuck with their work. These strategies help to make pupils resourceful and develop useful motivation and self-confidence.

Safeguarding is effective

The school's procedures for safeguarding pupils, including completing the single central record, meet statutory requirements. The school's approach to staff recruitment is thorough, ensuring that all necessary checks are made. The school ensures that staff are fully aware of their safeguarding responsibilities, and that training for staff is up to date.

Inspection findings

- The headteacher has built on what the school does well and has quickly strengthened areas that need improvement. School self-evaluation is accurate and thorough, and development planning is well founded on systematic monitoring.
- Children start Reception with skills and abilities typical for their age. In the last two years, children attending the local nursery prior to starting school have been much better prepared for school. Excellent teaching in the Reception class ensures that children settle well and make good progress across all areas of

learning and development. In 2015, the proportion achieving a good level of development was well above the national figure.

- Attainment in key stage 1 is generally high. The proportion of pupils who reached the expected level in the Year 1 phonics screening check was well above the national figure in 2015. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics in end-of-Year-2 assessments have been well above average in 2013 and 2014, and broadly average in 2015.
- Outcomes in early years and key stage 1 have not been unflinchingly high over the years because so many pupils come and go at different times. There is often insufficient time to catch up where there are gaps in their learning, particularly if pupils have experienced quite different educational systems. The school faces the same challenge in key stage 2.
- The school has developed a thorough system for assessing and tracking pupils' progress. This shows that pupils make at least expected progress, across all year groups in the school, in reading, writing and mathematics.
- In general, pupils eligible for support through pupil premium funding (additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and children from service families) make good progress and, like their classmates, attain particularly well in the early years and key stage 1.
- Where there are weaknesses in pupils' learning and progress, the school has demonstrated that it can make improvements. Work to improve handwriting, for example, has had a demonstrable impact on the quality of pupils' written work during the course of this year. Many pupils are working above the expected standard for their age.
- The school's monitoring shows that teaching is consistently good. Teachers plan learning well and skilfully direct and manage the pupils' learning and behaviour, including when behaviour is occasionally silly or challenging.
- Classrooms are lively and attractive places to learn. Displays of pupils' work celebrate their achievements across different subjects in the curriculum, and support the work of others by showing what they can achieve. Extended writing, for example, is prominently displayed in public areas so that pupils value its accomplishment. Pupils take pride in their work, and like it being displayed in classrooms and corridors.
- The school's new assessment system enables teachers to monitor pupils' progress much more closely. Teachers use assessment information well to inform their planning. Work is pitched at the right level for different pupils, and specific support for individual pupils is carefully targeted. The most able pupils are given suitably challenging tasks, and are expected to produce work of the highest quality in different subjects.
- Teachers follow the school's policy on marking and assessment, and work hard to give specific and helpful guidance. Pupils appreciate this feedback, often given orally, and respond to the teacher's advice and the 'next steps' comments.

- Central to the school's effectiveness is excellent communication with parents, based on face-to-face contact, informative newsletters and innovative use of electronic media, which enables instantaneous two-way communication about pupils' successes and conveyance of any concerns or queries. This enables parents to play a full role in their children's education, which they appreciate.
- Pupils behave well and are polite, friendly and proud of their school. They develop positive attitudes to learning, are enthusiastic about their work, and like many of the changes that they have noticed this year. They have, for example, noted that the headteacher wants quality from their singing, rather than volume!
- The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. Pupils are encouraged to be considerate and reflective, in assembly, in classrooms and in their everyday work. They are asked, for example, to reflect on where they want to be in five years time. However, the nature of the school population means that pupils do not often come across people from diverse backgrounds. Some pupils do not understand the differences of others, and can be hurtful, even if this is unintentional.
- Pupils say that they enjoy school and feel safe. They know who to turn to if they are unhappy and are confident that adults deal quickly and fairly with any occasional incidents of bullying.
- Pupils are very well prepared for the next phase of their education, whether this is their secondary school, or the next primary school that they transfer to. They develop positive attitudes to learning, a 'can do' approach and confidence in their own ability to face new and unfamiliar challenges.
- Governors show dedicated commitment to the school and demonstrated determination in securing the best possible appointment for headteacher. The governing body has sharpened its work, as a result of effective training received two years ago. Governors now balance well their support and challenge, and focus on the most pertinent issues.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website, although evaluation of the impact of pupil premium funding is not sufficiently detailed.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- pupils make consistently good progress in key stage 2 by:
 - sharpening teachers' work to improve pupils' grammar, spelling and punctuation
 - using assessment information to enable pupils new to the school to quickly make up any lost ground
 - developing the roles of subject leaders so they steer improved progress and attainment
- pupils develop an age-appropriate understanding and tolerance of the differences of others.

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

Paul Brooker

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, two assistant headteachers, subject leaders for English and mathematics and early years, four governor representatives and a group of pupils. Inspectors also spoke informally to staff, pupils and parents and took account of 22 responses on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, 18 responses from the staff survey and 15 from the pupil questionnaire. We also looked at a range of documentation, including information about safeguarding, pupil assessment information and school self-evaluation and development planning. All teachers were observed teaching and pupils' work was scrutinised.