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Dear Ms Morgan

Short inspection of Gosfield Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 November 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 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There have been many changes of leadership since the inspection in November 2011, with four headteachers during the last four years. You joined the school as deputy headteacher in September 2015 and became acting headteacher in April 2016.

The learning curve that you have had to climb has been extremely steep but you have managed it very well. In a relatively short time you have stabilised the school so that morale among staff is high, pupils enjoy coming to school and the trust of parents is returning.

The governors and local authority have ensured that you have been provided with the right, and sufficient, support to enable you to learn rapidly how to be an effective headteacher. The governors have an excellent understanding of the need for them to balance their responsibility to hold you to account with their duty of care towards you. You told me that the package of support provided 'has really moved us forward', and this is very clear. The support provided by a national leader of education (NLE) continues to be extremely valuable. She immediately recognised that you have 'great potential' as a leader and the 'great vision' necessary to lead a good school successfully. I know that the NLE's well-founded confidence in you has helped you to have confidence in yourself.

A specialist leader of education (SLE) works with you and the school regularly. He has helped you to become more proficient at evaluating the school's strengths and weaknesses, and at using this evaluation to write an appropriate action plan to further improve the school. Working with the SLE has enabled you to be sure that your judgements on the quality of teaching and learning in the school are accurate. The SLE commented that you are 'leading the school really, really well'. This was clearly evident during the inspection.

It is clear that the school's journey between its last inspection and this one has not been an entirely smooth one. You have now steadied the ship and the school is once again clearly good and improving. Morale among the staff team is now high and staff members' responses to the inspection survey were universally positive. You are also well on the way to gaining the trust and support of the parents, many of whom were previously very dissatisfied with the school. One parent spoke for many by commenting that under your leadership, the school has 'returned to a lovely community school where the children, their education and well-being are prioritised'.

Overall, the areas for development from the last inspection have been adequately addressed, although there is still work to do to ensure that pupils make rapid progress in writing. The quality of the outdoor learning environment in the early years has been greatly improved since the last inspection. Children now have access to a well-sized outdoor area and staff plan a good range of activities that capture children's interest. For example, during the inspection, children were thoroughly engaged by the opportunity to fill old socks with whatever they could find outside. Some chose to use soil while others used small toys. A member of staff then skilfully encouraged children to compare the size, weight and shapes of their socks by looking at and feeling them.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school's single central record of pre-employment checks now meets statutory requirements. You sought advice from an appropriate source to ensure that all requirements were met and took all necessary actions that were advised. As soon as you became aware of an issue where you had been given incorrect advice, you took immediate action to remedy this.

Current practices to ensure that only people suitable to work with children are employed at the school are robust. You have a thorough understanding of the importance of safer recruitment practices and ensure that procedures are equally robust, regardless of the post that is being filled.

Parents feel that their children are safe at the school. They appreciate the physical security of the school site and one parent commented that 'you just can't get in here' unless admitted via the front entrance by school staff. Many parents said that staff are very approachable and easy to talk to. This very open culture is a key element of how you ensure that pupils are kept safe.

You have undertaken the appropriate training to carry out the role of designated safeguarding lead effectively. You have ensured that staff receive regular training so that they remain up to date with current guidance and issues. You ensure that records of child protection concerns are robust and fit for purpose.

Inspection findings

- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is extremely low. Just under 6% of the school population is considered to be disadvantaged, and only 2% eligible for free school meals. This means that it is not helpful to monitor the progress of these pupils as a group. You and your staff know these pupils very well, individually. You track their progress closely and regularly, and have equally high expectations for this group as for all pupils in the school. This ensures that disadvantaged pupils make good progress.
- You have, quite rightly, made improving the quality of phonics teaching a priority since you became acting headteacher. As a result, there was a slight improvement in the results of the Year 1 phonics screening check in June 2016, although the proportion of pupils who reached the expected level for the check remained below average.
- The proportion of the current Year 1 cohort that is on track to reach the expected level is similar to the national average as a result of the changes you have made. It was clearly evident during the inspection that pupils are now making good progress in learning phonics skills because of the good teaching that they receive. For example, in a Year 1 phonics session the teacher continually gave pupils the opportunity to blend sounds to read words and to segment them in order to spell. She routinely asked pupils to count the sounds in words before attempting to write them. As a result, pupils were able to spell simple words accurately and efficiently.
- Although there have been great improvements in phonics teaching, there is still more to do. Some staff are more confident and competent in teaching phonics than others. Where this is the case, pupils make more rapid progress than others. You have already put plans in place to address this.
- The school's records show clearly that pupils throughout the school are now making good progress in reading, writing, mathematics and a wide range of other subjects. This is clearly evident in pupils' exercise books. However, the progress that pupils make in writing is not as strong as in reading and mathematics.
- The improved teaching of phonics has not yet permeated throughout the school. Older pupils make unnecessary spelling mistakes because there are gaps in their phonics knowledge. Pupils throughout the school make errors in grammar and punctuation because there has been too little focus on developing their basic skills. Similarly, pupils' handwriting is sometimes poorly formed or underdeveloped because sufficient attention has not been paid to teaching these skills explicitly. Pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to write lengthier pieces of work to enable them to build up greater stamina in writing.
- Until very recently, the proportion of pupils who were listed as having special educational needs and/or disabilities was unrealistically high. The special educational needs coordinator joined the school in April 2015 and immediately

set about assessing which pupils should be on the school's list and which should not. The 'pruned' special educational needs list is of a much more reasonable size and now only includes pupils who meet the definition under the current code of practice.

- The special educational needs coordinator is experienced in her role and is highly effective. She knows all the pupils extremely well and has very high aspirations for them. She monitors pupils' progress frequently and takes appropriate action when pupils are not making the progress that they should. As a result, current pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making good progress.
- Until recently, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities was in the lowest 10% nationally. You have introduced initiatives to increase attendance overall and these are clearly helping to improve attendance of these groups too. You know the pupils with low attendance well as individuals and have addressed the specific issues that have affected their rates of attendance. As a result, pupils now attend school regularly and on time.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and show very good attitudes to learning. They behave very well because the rules are clear and staff's expectations are high. Pupils are well mannered and friendly, welcoming to visitors and keen to talk about their school and their work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- Increase the proportion of pupils who make rapid progress in writing, by:
 - focusing more on the basic skills of grammar, punctuation and spelling
 - teaching handwriting explicitly and systematically
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to write at length.
- Raise the proportion of Year 1 pupils who reach the expected level of the phonics screening check by ensuring that phonics teaching is of a consistently good quality.

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

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the school's leaders. I met with the NLE and the SLE who are currently working with the school. I met with the school council and spoke to other pupils throughout the day. I observed teaching and learning in all of the classes, some jointly with you. I looked at the work in pupils' exercise books and scrutinised a range of school documents, including the single central record of checks to ensure the suitability of staff to work with children.

The inspection explored the following key lines of enquiry:

- Do leaders and governors ensure that the school keeps up to date with statutory safeguarding guidance and does safeguarding practice in the school reflect this?
- Do current pupils make good progress in writing throughout the school, including disadvantaged pupils?
- How accurately are pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities identified and are current pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities making good progress?
- What is the quality of phonics teaching like and why do boys appear to do less well than girls?
- What does the school do to address individual pupils' weak attendance and is it working?