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Mrs Tamara Allen
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Dear Mrs Allen

Short inspection of Holme CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 16 March 2017, 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your deputy headteacher form a successful team and work well together. You have responded very effectively to the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. In particular, subject leaders and governors now use a wide range of information to check different groups of pupils make good or better progress. Governance is a strength of the school. Each governor's skills contribute to well-reasoned decision-making. Governors support immediate improvements, such as to the teaching of spelling, and look ahead to ensure the long-term viability of the school. Regular visits enable governors to question and commend leaders on the quality of education provided.

Pupils are a joy. They behave exceptionally well and contribute fully to the harmonious community that is a strong feature of their school. They support one another: older pupils like nothing better than to help those younger than themselves. They mix happily at break and lunchtime, and move in a very orderly manner around the highly attractive school environment. They soak up any and every opportunity to take responsibility. A 'reading ambassador' told the inspector, 'I help children to get better at reading, which is very important because it is a life skill'. A 'truly trusted' pupil said she sometimes shows visitors around the school.

Pupils' very strong work ethic, and positive attitudes to learning, help ensure that no learning time is lost. They respond very positively to teachers' high expectations of

them. For example, when challenged to think again, a young pupil describing a science activity improved vocabulary from 'went into' to 'absorbed'. Pupils' motivation stems partly from what they describe as 'how teachers let you interact with learning'. In class, pupils say – if they understand – their teacher will ask them to go to the front of the class and explain to everyone else. Around the school, 'learning detectives' say they 'go around with the headteacher and look to spot examples of the good things children do to learn better'.

You correctly judge early years provision to be a strength. Children make a good start. The learning environment is bright, attractive and well organised. During the inspection, a child used a wall display of common words to help him write. He carefully sounded out words to check he had the right one. He concentrated to ensure that his writing was neat and legible. He sustained his concentration and was very proud of his achievement and the teacher's praise. Strong leadership and skilled teaching have seen the proportion of children reaching a good level of development increase over the last three years.

Teaching in Years 1 and 2 builds well on the firm foundation in the early years. In 2016, by the end of Year 2, a higher proportion of pupils than the national average reached the expected standard, as did the proportion working to greater depth.

In 2016, national test results at the end of Year 6 were broadly average: a little above in reading and writing, a little below in mathematics. Overall, the combined result for pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was also a little above average. However, the grammar, punctuation and spelling component of writing was below average. You and your leaders, supported by the governing body, took immediate action to improve spelling, the weakest element.

The small proportion of disadvantaged pupils generally do well. In particular, the most able disadvantaged pupils make rapid progress similar to their peers. However, the extra help given to those who struggle is not enabling these pupils to reduce the difference between themselves and other pupils nationally.

The relationship with parents is generally strong. Parents appreciate all that is offered to their children. Parents praise the 'general feeling of energy', the 'attention to detail' and that 'the school ticks all the right boxes'. However, a small proportion feel their views are not listened to. To help, the school has re-established a 'parent council', begun to seek views and make changes. This is a promising beginning.

Safeguarding is effective.

By their actions and example, leaders and governors give safeguarding the highest priority. Checks on the suitability of staff, governors, volunteers and contractors are thorough. A governor regularly checks that safeguarding arrangements are robust.

Thorough training means staff are always vigilant. They know what to look for, and fully understand their responsibilities to protect pupils. They know and follow the

clear and robust procedures. They know to challenge school leaders if they feel concerns are not followed up vigorously. Staff are suitably trained in first aid and paediatric first aid. Educational visits are preceded by thorough risk assessments.

Pupils say they feel safe and well cared for in school, and that they have adults to turn to if they are worried. They understand what bullying is, and the forms it can take. They say bullying is very rare. Pupils are able to explain how they keep safe when using the internet, and the dangers to be aware of on the roads. They receive quality training in the use of bicycles and scooters. Nine in every ten parents responding to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, agreed their children are safe, well cared for and happy at Holme Primary School.

Inspection findings

- One of my key lines of enquiry was about the progress of the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils. This was because the proportion of pupils achieving 'greater depth' in the 2016 tests was low in Year 6. No disadvantaged pupils achieved greater depth in either Year 2 or Year 6 in 2016. Current in-school information and inspection evidence suggests a much larger proportion of both groups are working at greater depth throughout the school. Innovations that have benefited these pupils particularly, but not exclusively, include the extra specialist teaching, for example in science. All disadvantaged pupils, including the most able, also benefit from the extra teacher who gives particular attention to any gaps or misconceptions in their learning.
- I also considered the progress all pupils make from Year 3 to Year 6. This was because the progress in past years has not been consistently good. Your careful tracking of the progress that each pupil makes demonstrates that, currently, the vast majority of pupils make good progress from their various starting points at the beginning of Year 3. As well as in reading, writing and mathematics, this is in a range of subjects including art, music and science. However, the small proportion of disadvantaged pupils with low prior attainment do not reduce the difference between themselves and other pupils nationally.
- I also looked at the progress boys make in mathematics and writing. Boys told me they enjoy the opportunities to solve mathematical problems, and work with other pupils to figure things out. The change of emphasis in writing, too, is beneficial. Writing activities, linked more and more to other subjects, 'hook' them into learning. For example, word-processing articles for the school newspaper, or writing a persuasive letter saying why they should be able to participate in an archaeological 'dig' of a second world war aircraft, engage boys.
- I also looked at the persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils. An analysis of the attendance rates from the last and present academic years showed that absence generally, and persistent absence particularly, is low. All pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, now attend better than the national average.
- I also looked at the impact of subject leaders and governors, and how they use information to check all groups of pupils do well. Both subject leaders and governors, as reported earlier in this letter, are now highly effective.

- In my final line of enquiry, I sought to establish how well pupils achieve in spelling. You and your colleagues moved swiftly once you recognised that spelling was a relative weakness. You analysed what was wrong, changed the school's approach and trained staff in its implementation. Governors backed your judgement with funds for extra resources. After a few weeks, you started checking the impact of the new approach. You found an immediate improvement. Your current in-school information and inspection evidence suggests that spelling results this year will be much higher.
- The school's website meets statutory requirements for published information, although a few documents, such as the Year 2 curriculum map, are hard to find.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers use the most effective approaches to enable lower-attaining disadvantaged pupils to make better progress through the school
- they redouble their efforts to engage parents fully and ensure that they have a meaningful voice in the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Robert Greatrex
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and other school staff. I held meetings with your middle leaders who have responsibility for particular subjects and year groups, to discuss progress and the impact of decisions leaders have made. I spoke to a representative of the local authority, met with a group of governors and groups of pupils selected by the school.

I scrutinised various sources of information, including your assessment data, school improvement plan and records of monitoring and evaluation. I also viewed the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, the records of checks made on the suitability of staff to work with children, and attendance information. With you and/or your deputy headteacher, I visited classes and observed learning, and viewed work in pupils' books.

I spoke to some parents and took account of the 41 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey for parents. In addition, I considered the seven responses to the staff questionnaire and the 21 responses from pupils.