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Mrs Joan Edwards
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Edwards

Short inspection of Stalham Community Infant & Pre-School

Following my visit to the school on 6 June 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 March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Stalham Infant School is an outward-looking school. You, your team and governors have actively maintained and developed its good provision since the previous inspection. Since then, the school has federated with another local infant school and has also taken on the pre-school provision on the school's site.

You have continued to ensure that a strong focus is maintained on meeting the needs of every individual within the school's community, including those who only spend a short time at the school. You and your team know each child in this small school well and so relationships between pupils and staff are a strength of the provision.

You have taken effective action to address the previous inspection report issues, relating to writing and to early years. You have built a strong partnership with the local children's centre so that you know the needs of children even before they join you. As a result, you are able to put in place early help for any child who needs it. By taking over the running of the pre-school and ensuring joint working between the pre-school and Reception provision, you have improved the start that children have at school. This has resulted in improved outcomes at the end of the Reception Year.

Governors have confidence in your leadership but are also secure in challenging you

when they feel that this is needed. For example, governors asked you to take steps to improve the progress of the most able pupils and to provide more detailed information about attendance. Governors carry out their responsibilities with diligence, visiting the school to look at specific aspects linked to the school's improvement plan. They have audited their skills to make sure that they have the necessary abilities to fulfil the responsibilities that they hold. They meet with you regularly and talk with staff and with parents. As a result, they know the school's strengths and weaknesses well.

Teachers work well together and you recognise that you benefit from a strong and effective team. The federation with another local infant school has enabled all teachers to take on leadership responsibilities by working in curriculum teams. This has enabled them to develop their professional skills and has benefited both schools. Teachers know their pupils very well. Teachers plan lessons that interest and engage pupils. They carefully check what pupils have learned within lessons and when they mark their work, and use this information to plan subsequent work, which is well matched to their needs. As a result, pupils make good progress from their starting points.

Pupils enjoy school. Those I spoke to said that 'everyone is a friend at this school' and that there are lots of interesting lessons. For example, pupils told me that they enjoy learning outdoors in the 'forest school' and learning about other countries, such as Brazil. They spoke about playtimes as happy times and said that there is lots of equipment to play with. They also said that their teachers are kind and help them to learn. As I visited classes, I saw that pupils behave well. They listen to their teachers and respond to directions quickly because teachers reinforce their high expectations regularly. Pupils enjoy their learning; many showed me their work with pride.

Only a small number of parents responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire because the school had technical difficulties in distributing the link to parents prior to the inspection. However, the vast majority of those that did respond said that their children are happy and make good progress. Parents welcome the good opportunities provided when they can come in, work with their child and find out more about what they have been learning. They appreciate the care that you and your staff provide for their children. One parent summed up the views of many saying, 'I cannot fault the school. Brilliant staff.' Those responses received during the inspection matched those from the school's own annual survey, in which almost every parent was positive about the school, their child's progress and the school's engagement with them.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your team ensure that keeping pupils safe underpins the work of the school. You check everyone employed at the school in line with statutory regulations. You and your team know each child well. Regular training provided ensures that all staff are keenly aware of any changes in behaviour or other signs that may indicate that a child is at risk of harm. You record concerns carefully and make sure that action is taken swiftly to address these. You work with external agencies and insist that

support is provided or maintained, wherever it is needed. You teach pupils about how to keep themselves safe, including when using technology. For example, pupils told me that they know what to do if they come across something upsetting when using the internet. Pupils said that school is a safe place and that adults take care of them well, and parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire agreed that this is the case.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed that I would look at progress in writing as a line of enquiry. Writing was an area for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. Outcomes in writing at Year 2 have been lower than those in reading. In 2016, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard was below that found nationally, and no pupil achieved greater depth.
- Together, we looked at pupils' writing in their English books and writing in other subjects. In most English books, we saw that pupils are making good progress in writing, especially in learning the technical skills such as letter formation, punctuation and grammar.
- We compared school assessment information about pupils' progress in writing over time with the work in pupils' books. We found that teachers' judgements about pupils' progress from their starting points are very accurate.
- We agreed that too few opportunities are provided for developing pupils' writing skills in other subjects. This is restricting the progress that some pupils are making, including some most-able pupils, because they do not have enough opportunities to apply and refine their writing skills in different contexts.
- The next area we agreed that I would look at in detail was the progress of boys in reading and writing. This was because, in the past, more girls than boys have reached the expected standard in each year group in reading and writing.
- We compared the writing of boys and girls in each class and looked at reading progress, using the reading ages that you keep. We watched some phonics teaching and saw that boys and girls were equally keen to participate. You ensure that pupils' needs are well met by carefully grouping pupils and matching the teaching to each group's needs. As a result, boys and girls are both making good progress in reading.
- You explained how you and your team have modified the curriculum to make it more engaging for boys so that they are more willing to read and write. In particular, we saw how, in the Reception class, boys and girls are equally keen to read and write because the teacher skilfully weaves literacy tasks into others. For example, some boys had made models and were happily writing labels and captions for them.
- We agreed that, in Years 1 and 2, there are not enough opportunities to capture boys' enthusiasm for writing. This is because, sometimes, in subjects such as history and science, teachers provide sheets that restrict pupils' writing with too few opportunities for this to be extended. As a result, some boys are not making as much progress in writing as they could.

- We looked at the progress of disadvantaged pupils and how funding for these pupils is being used to help them make good progress, to see if they are making consistently good progress.
- You showed me how you identify the possible difficulties that each pupil may be facing, which could impede their progress. You explained how you make sure that support is well matched to each pupil's needs. We looked at individual case studies of pupils showing the support provided and its impact. You showed me the range of support that is put in place to support pupils' academic and emotional needs and how you also work with parents to help them to support their children at home. Pupil assessments show that, as a result, disadvantaged pupils make good progress.
- The final area we looked at during the inspection was attendance. You and your governors are aware that last year attendance was below the national average and too low for different groups in the school.
- You have combined with the local authority attendance officer to address absence, and this has had a positive impact on improving attendance overall. You have worked closely with individual parents whose children are absent frequently and have reduced the number of pupils who are persistently absent.
- We discussed how pupils joining and leaving the school outside normal times affect your attendance figures to some degree, and so attendance is still slightly below national averages. You know that continuing the improvements in attendance remains a priority for the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more opportunities are provided for pupils to apply and develop their writing skills in different subjects, including for the most able pupils
- teachers capture boys' enthusiasm for writing in Years 1 and 2 and accelerate their progress, so that a greater proportion reach the expected standard
- they continue the improvements in attendance so that it at least reaches the national average.

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

Yours sincerely

Maria Curry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, with teachers and with three governors. I met with a group of pupils from Reception, Years 1 and 2. I scrutinised a range of documents, including information on pupils' progress, safeguarding, development planning and the school's self-evaluation. I visited all classes and evaluated pupils' work. I checked the school's website and found it to meet requirements on the publication of specified information.