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Laura Jestico
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Dear Ms Jestico

Short inspection of Hempnall Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 October 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 June 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 have used the time since September 2016, when you took up post as executive headteacher, to good effect. Rather than make sweeping changes, you wisely evaluated the school's strengths and weaknesses and have managed change with sensitivity, but also with a clear determination to improve standards across the school. You have overcome a number of challenging circumstances since your arrival. Weaker teaching has been dealt with firmly, you managed the long-term absence of your deputy headteacher well and you have established improved systems to manage staff's performance in order to hold them to account. All of this is a testament to your resilience and determination. This is a school that continues to improve.

Your efforts over the past year have not gone unrecognised. Parents, staff, pupils and governors have confidence in your leadership. One parent who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, stated: 'I know that my son is well looked after, happy and challenged enough to always try to be better than he thinks possible.' This comment is typical of those of the many parents who responded to the questionnaire. All parents who responded to the questionnaire would recommend the school to others.

Your middle leaders ably support you in your efforts to raise standards and expectations. They each play a key role in working with you to deliver the content of your school improvement plan. You have prioritised the right things to make a difference in maintaining and improving the quality of the provision. You draw on the expertise in your federated primary school and encourage staff in both schools to share good practice.

Pupils are happy and feel safe when in school. They behave well in lessons and respond well to their teachers' high expectations. They know how they can improve their work because their teachers make this clear to them through written or verbal feedback. They know and understand their targets and work diligently towards achieving these.

You have worked hard to raise pupils' self-esteem and ensure that they have higher expectations of themselves. As executive headteacher, you make your expectations very clear to staff and pupils. It is clear that you want every pupil to reach their potential through working hard and experiencing teaching which is consistently effective.

Pupils have a wide range of opportunities to develop their leadership skills. In addition to the school council, you have introduced sports leaders, digital leaders and eco leaders. Pupils told me that they appreciate all of these and also the opportunity to share each other's success in the re-introduced celebration assemblies.

Members of the governing body have a wide range of useful skills, which they put to good effect in challenging and supporting the school's leaders. They are astutely aware of the school's strengths and the challenges that still remain. Minutes of their meetings clearly identify many instances when they ask pertinent questions in which to challenge you and to check the progress you are making against the actions in your school improvement plan.

Pupils' outcomes in the early years foundation stage and at the end of key stages 1 and 2 disappointingly dipped in 2016, following some years of stability. Pleasingly, there was a marked improvement in 2017. Children who achieved a good level of development in the early years equalled the national average, and 100% of pupils reached the required standard in the phonics screening check in Year 1. An above-average proportion of pupils reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 1. However, the proportion of pupils working at greater depth in these subjects was just below average. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 2 was a little above average, and those meeting the higher standard was average. You acknowledge that pupils' progress in reading and in mathematics needs to improve further, as does the proportion of pupils who achieve the higher standard overall. The small number of disadvantaged pupils do not yet achieve as well as their non-disadvantaged peers nationally. Your school improvement planning identifies well-considered strategies to address these challenges.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding children is a strong aspect of this school's work. All staff have received and read the latest guidance, 'Keeping children safe in education' (2016), and demonstrated a strong awareness of safeguarding issues. All staff have also undergone training in the government's 'Prevent' duty. Staff, including those who join the school mid-year, receive up-to-date training on safeguarding matters. Any minor administrative flaws relating to the school's record of recruitment checks of the suitability of staff were rectified during the inspection and the record is compliant with current requirements.

Records kept by the school of children who are at risk or deemed to be vulnerable are very well maintained and informative, with details of resolution. They are kept secure, and appropriate external agencies are informed as and when necessary.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain that the school remains good, my first line of enquiry was to look at how well you have addressed the areas for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection. These included: providing pupils with opportunities to practise their numeracy skills; giving pupils time to respond to their teachers; written feedback; improving the quality of teachers' questioning; and developing pupils' information and communications technology (ICT) skills. I wanted to assess whether the changes at senior leadership level and to some of the teaching staff had had any impact on the school's progress.
- Pupils are given opportunities to use and develop their numeracy skills across a range of subjects. Years 5 and 6 develop their numeracy skills well in science. I observed Years 2, 3 and 4 developing their understanding of fractions in an afternoon session in which they were making a fruit salad, and cut fruit into halves, quarters or eighths. Children in the early years setting now have trugs, which contain mathematics resources in different learning areas. These approaches are helping to improve pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts.
- Teachers have had training on improving their questioning skills to test out pupils' understanding. I saw this in action during a mathematics lesson when pupils in Years 2 and 3 were solving word problems. The teacher actively encouraged pupils to explain their workings out by telling them to 'prove' how they had reached their answers. Teachers implement the school's marking policy effectively, providing comments on how pupils can improve their work and allowing them ample time to respond. You have also targeted the provision of ICT in the school. Pupils have access to digital tablets and you provide pupils with access to Quick Response (QR) codes which, when scanned, give them a lot more information about the topic they are studying. Pupils are becoming more confident in their use of ICT.
- Changes in staffing at senior level have not acted as a barrier to the school's progress. Indeed, staff feel galvanised since your appointment. You have dealt

firmly with weak teaching, and are determined that every pupil will have a positive experience at school. You have actively sought out schools in the North of England which are similar to yours and which face the same challenges, in order to implement their strategies at Hempnall if you feel that this is appropriate.

- My second line of enquiry was to establish whether the improvement in outcomes in 2017 is sustainable and how you explain the dip in 2016. You explained that the pupils who achieved poor outcomes in 2016 had experienced weak teaching lower down the school. This affected more pupils because pupils are taught in mixed-age classes. Although you have satisfactorily addressed this issue, you realise that your focus on high-quality teaching remains a priority in order to make up for any shortfalls. The quality of teaching rightly features in your improvement plan, and the improvements in outcomes in 2017 demonstrate that you are doing the right things to make a difference.
- My scrutiny of pupils' books and my observations of pupils' learning and progress demonstrate that good-quality teaching is having an impact, and pupils' progress continues to improve across all year groups. However, a continued focus is necessary on improving pupils' progress in reading and mathematics, and on ensuring that more pupils achieve the higher standards. You have wisely engaged the services of two advisers from the local authority to work with subject leaders in English and mathematics. Their audits have resulted in reports being produced which comment favourably on the progress you are making.
- My third line of enquiry considered how well you are using the pupil premium funding for the few disadvantaged pupils in your school. Your governors have a good understanding of how this money is spent, and your evaluation of the impact of this funding is detailed and transparent. You use a variety of strategies to motivate these pupils. These include one-to-one intervention sessions, sessions to raise pupils' self-esteem, rewards in the form of books and enabling pupils to build an electric racing car, which they race against other schools, and then write about the experience.
- Although caution needs to be exercised in making comparisons against non-disadvantaged pupils nationally, due to the small numbers, it is clear that the strategies you have implemented have not yet had the impact you wish them to. Ongoing monitoring of this group and the support you offer them remain a priority.
- My final line of enquiry related to the attendance and persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This was because your historical information shows that the attendance of these two groups of pupils does not match that of their peers.
- You presented me with case studies for individual pupils to provide more details that explain why their attendance is less regular. Some families have chosen to take their children on holiday during school time, which inevitably affects their progress as well. You continue to work with the families of these groups of pupils to make clear your expectations. A revised attendance policy is due to be approved imminently by the governing body. This policy makes clear your high expectations relating to regular attendance and the fact that you are prepared to

issue fixed penalty notices to those families who are in breach of the new policy.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the focus on improving progress in reading and in mathematics is maintained so that more pupils achieve the higher standard
- the strategies to improve the performance of disadvantaged pupils continue to be monitored for impact, so that this small group of pupils achieves better
- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities matches that of their peers.

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

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and other senior leaders, as well as a group of middle leaders, to discuss progress since the previous inspection. I met with the vice-chair and three other members of the governing body to gain their views on the school. I also met with a representative of the local authority.

I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including your self-evaluation summary document, the school's plans for improvement and assessment information for all year groups. I held a meeting to examine the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, the records of checks that leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children, and information relating to attendance.

I undertook observations of learning across the school, viewed work in pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their learning when visiting lessons. I took account of the views of three staff members who responded to the online survey. I also considered the 36 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, 'Parent View'.