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Mrs Linda Storey
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Storey

Short inspection of Saffron Green Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 December 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

Your highly effective leadership has ensured that the good quality of education has been maintained at the school. You have also secured some significant improvements since the previous inspection. Despite not receiving a standard notification, you were incredibly well prepared, as was the school, for inspection. This was indicative of the strong teamwork, exemplary organisation and well-practised routines that I saw throughout the inspection. You know your school well. Alongside other senior leaders and governors, you assess the school's effectiveness objectively. This gives you a clear blueprint to make the school better.

You and your established leaders continually monitor and evaluate standards across the school. You reflect upon the findings, and act quickly to deal with any emerging patterns, helping the school to evolve and improve further. Commendably, you have accomplished this while developing staff and keeping morale high. The staff survey responses were universally positive, and reflect the complete confidence that staff have in your leadership and management of the school. Your mentoring programme for new leaders is helping them quickly to become established within their roles. In your development plan, you rightly identify the need for new leaders to become fully accountable for their particular areas of responsibility.

You have created a culture where all staff are passionate that Saffron Green remains an inclusive, accepting and community-minded school. I noticed immediately the warm, friendly and inviting feel of the school. In challenging weather conditions, staff worked tirelessly to ensure that the school remained open

and that children were kept safe. This helps to illustrate the determination of staff to meet the wide range of needs of local families. Parents appreciate this and are extremely positive about the school. Of the 93 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, the overwhelming majority of parents said that they would recommend the school. In their free-text comments in the parental questionnaire, most praised the school and talked about a 'fantastic school with great teachers', where children go to school 'with a smile on their face'. Parents were impressed with the number of opportunities, such as morning coffee, for parents to discuss matters openly. While a few parents raised specific concerns, you are aware of these issues and could explain your actions, which have been timely and appropriate.

Since the last inspection, you have developed leadership at all levels. Standards in early years have risen steeply and children's good level of development is now broadly in line with national averages. From below-average starting points, this represents good progress. Children build upon these successes and achieve above the national average in the Year 1 phonics check. Staff ensure that these high standards are maintained throughout key stage 1. By the age of six, all children, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve results that are at least in line with those seen nationally, and often above average. In key stage 2, over a three-year period, standards have again been broadly in line with national averages, with writing often above average. You explained that in 2017 pupils' progress in mathematics and reading dipped. You have addressed this dip quickly and there are early signs that pupils are making improved progress as a result of the interventions you have put in place. We agreed that, as the year progresses, leaders will continue to monitor these interventions closely to ensure that pupils receive the right support quickly.

You have worked effectively with external agencies, including the local authority, to support staff and local families. Your collaborative approach has been well focused and has led to significant improvements. Leaders spoke very positively about the help they had received, especially in early years, and how this has strengthened key aspects of the school's provision.

Governors know the school well. They are aware of the school's priorities because they know about the progress that different groups of pupils make. They are highly committed, and share your belief that this is an inclusive and compassionate school. They work well with you and your leaders, and have provided you with invaluable support to overcome some unforeseen and unexpected staffing difficulties. At the same time, they use the accurate and informative reports that you and your leaders provide to challenge and ask testing questions, assuring themselves that you are working effectively to improve standards and rectify any emerging issues quickly.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The training of all leaders and governors is up to date and appropriate, in accordance with their responsibilities. This helps them keep abreast of the latest statutory guidance. You ensure that staff receive suitable training so that they

understand the potential risks to children's safety. The single central record of checks on adults employed at the school is accurate, and the regular audits that you carry out, including checks by governors, ensure that it contains all the required pre-employment information.

Staff are alert to any possible dangers and work hard to support children and families. As a result, the school's referral systems work effectively to safeguard pupils. Your safeguarding records are detailed, comprehensive, and well maintained. You have established clear lines of communication, and work effectively with external agencies. Where child protection issues exist, you are aware of the link between non-attendance and safeguarding and follow up any absences quickly and efficiently.

Children said that they feel safe in school because 'there are so many teachers and they are all so helpful'. They know about potential risks, including 'stranger danger', through assemblies. Children said that other children are sometimes unkind because 'they get mad' or 'are having a bad day', but teachers deal with this and help those children 'to behave better'. Older pupils also said that they feel safe and know how to stay safe, including online. They are familiar with the school rules, including 'the right to feel safe', and what this means to them in practice. From the 93 parents who responded to Parent View, more than nine out of 10 agreed that their children feel safe and are well looked after.

Inspection findings

- Pupils at Saffron Green arrive at the school from many different backgrounds and with a range of different starting points. Although pupils in key stage 2 have achieved well over time, some progress and attainment measures dipped last year in reading and mathematics. In addition, the school's overall attendance has been below the national average for the last three years, including lower attendance for some groups of pupils. Therefore, we agreed that my key lines of enquiry would focus on these specific aspects to see how leaders have brought about improvements.
- Your self-evaluation of the school's strengths and priorities is objective and accurate. You acknowledge that the school needed to improve pupils' progress in reading and mathematics by the end of key stage 2. You provided compelling first-hand evidence on why some outcomes had dipped, the actions you have taken, and the positive impact that these have had.
- You have looked closely at last year's results, and noted that owing to the small cohort, some outcomes disproportionately affected the overall figures. Nonetheless, you have reviewed your provision, including your intervention programme. You have strengthened teaching, and are providing more specific support to pupils who need to catch up. Early evidence suggests that this support is helping pupils make better progress.
- Staff training on new interventions in mathematics helps to address pupils' specific needs well. All staff can now deliver the support programmes effectively, including developing pupils' problem-solving skills and mental arithmetic. The positive impact of your actions is evident in the improved work in pupils' books,

their learning in the classroom and in their most recent assessments. These all reflect the good progress that pupils currently make.

- In terms of last year's reading results, you explained that some children with additional needs found the vocabulary challenging. Your new guided-reading system, which includes a range of useful materials and activities, addresses this well. The school's latest assessment information confirms that pupils are on course to make at least good progress over time and attain well.
- Another area that I focused on was attendance. Over the last three years, overall attendance has been below the national average, with the persistent absence of some vulnerable groups of pupils being worse than the national average. During the inspection, inspection evidence showed that attendance has improved significantly. You have successfully raised the profile of attendance among parents through newsletters, displays, rewards and assemblies. The message that 'good attenders learn better' is hitting home. The school's overall attendance figure for this term is now above last year's national average.
- One group with previous low attendance were pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Following the departure of your previous SEN coordinator, you have completed the statutory training yourself. You have set up new small-group provision that better meets pupils' needs. The nurturing and caring environment that you provide helps pupils with additional needs settle more quickly, receive more support, and enjoy learning more. Alongside the effective work you already do with other agencies to provide families with extra help, this has had a marked effect on raising the attendance of this group. In fact, your latest attendance figures for all groups of pupils has improved, and pupils who have SEN now attend broadly in line with all pupils nationally.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to work with parents to tackle pupils' absence robustly so that the recent improvements in attendance are maintained
- the leadership roles of middle and senior leaders continue to develop so that teaching and learning flourish across all areas of the curriculum
- recent interventions are monitored closely so that they successfully support pupils to make even better progress in mathematics and reading.

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

Yours sincerely

John Randall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspection was carried out within 15 minutes of the notification call. The school had been closed the previous day owing to the snow, and a standard notification call had not been possible. The school had been sent, via email, the standard notification documentation the previous day.

I met with you to discuss progress since the previous inspection and to agree the key lines of enquiry for the inspection. I spoke informally to staff and pupils, and held a series of formal meetings with you, three middle leaders and the chair of governors.

I reviewed a wide range of information provided, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, governors' minutes, leaders' records for monitoring standards in teaching, learning and assessment, school attendance and behaviour records and progress reviews. I scrutinised the school's safeguarding, staff recruitment and child protection procedures. We visited lessons and looked at pupils' work in all classes across the school. I also looked at 93 responses to Parent View, including the free-text comments and four staff survey returns.