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23 January 2018

Mr Stephen Dennis
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Dennis

Short inspection of Tollgate Community Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 9 January 2018, 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, together with your leadership team, have built on the strengths identified at the previous inspection and have ensured that the school remains highly valued by pupils and parents and carers alike. The school is popular and has welcomed an increasing number of pupils in recent years to help meet demand in the locality. Everyone who attends Tollgate is treated as an individual. Parents are full of praise for the school and one wrote, 'It is very well led and teachers always inspire pupils.' As a result of your effective work, rates of attendance are rising quickly because pupils enjoy coming to school. However, a very few pupils still do not attend regularly enough.

Your staff are equally pleased to be part of the Tollgate community. They appreciate the support they receive from you and your leadership team and the many opportunities that they have to develop professionally. All the members of your staff team work well together to keep pupils safe and ensure that they make good progress over time. Teachers explained that they do not feel overburdened because you take a sensible approach to workload and only focus on the things that 'have an impact on the learning and progress of children'.

Your pupils live out the school rules. 'Be kind. Try hard. Take care.' Pupils take great pride in their work, which is generally presented very neatly. They are respectful of their friends and treat everyone fairly. Their behaviour in class is almost always positive. Pupils are well mannered and polite. One parent told inspectors that

'Children are encouraged to be the best they can be.' Only occasionally do some pupils become slightly restless because they want to be challenged even more. You are aware that this is sometimes the case because your monitoring of teaching is regular and accurate.

On the whole, high standards of achievement have been maintained. However, you were rightly disappointed by the outcomes of the 2017 mathematics key stage 2 tests. You have carefully analysed what went wrong and have set about addressing the weaknesses rigorously and with vigour. The 'year of mathematics' project has certainly raised the profile of the subject across the school and is leading to higher expectations among staff and improved teaching. Outcomes for current pupils in mathematics are improving as the pupils grow in confidence. However, some inconsistencies in teaching remain when pupils are not given enough support or, at other times, work is not challenging enough. Similarly, the disappointing spelling scores in the English grammar, punctuation and spelling test have led to increased rigour in the teaching of this aspect of English. We observed teachers focusing carefully on the accuracy of pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar skills when we visited classes together. While early improvements are very clearly evident, there is still more to do to help pupils catch up with the higher national expectations.

The curriculum is highly engaging and interesting. Every opportunity is used to develop pupils' literacy skills and help prepare them to be responsible citizens. Pupils enjoy a range of exciting topics and activities. However, progress sometimes slows because the development of pupils' skills in subjects other than English and mathematics is not planned well enough.

At the time of the previous inspection, you were asked to improve assessment systems. These systems are now far more accurate in English and mathematics and are used regularly to check how well groups of pupils are doing. In some other subject areas, new assessment systems are still being developed to match the curriculum that is being taught. We agreed that more could be done to assess pupils when they first join the school, especially those who have struggled with reading at their previous schools, so that you can help them to make rapid progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Governors regularly check that policies are implemented correctly by visiting the school frequently and talking to staff and pupils. Parents are completely confident that their children are safe and well looked after at school.

Staff are well trained and are very aware of their responsibilities and the procedures to keep pupils safe. The leader with overall responsibility for safeguarding knows the community and the school's families very well. She is very aware of the greatest risks that pupils face in the community. School leaders take the correct action when they believe that pupils have become children missing from education or when they

suspect that pupils are at risk of other types of harm, including female genital mutilation. In all instances, the school works well with other agencies.

Leaders recognise that one of the greatest risks to pupils is online safety. A wide-ranging programme to educate pupils and parents about staying safe online is in place. This includes understanding the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.

Inspection findings

- Improving rates of attendance has been a relentless focus of leaders and governors. Their strategy and actions have been successful. In 2015–2016, the attendance rates of some groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, was in the lowest 10% nationally. Attendance rates improved overall in 2016–2017 and are continuing to improve this academic year. However, leaders recognise that there is no room for complacency as the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is not improving as quickly as that of other pupils.
- Leaders took immediate and decisive action to reverse the decline in outcomes in mathematics. Expectations of what pupils can achieve have risen, and there is an increased focus on problem solving and reasoning. The vast majority of teachers have strong subject knowledge and are well supported by teaching assistants to challenge all pupils, including the most able. As a result, pupils throughout the school are currently making good progress in mathematics. However, there is still some variation in the quality of teaching and some teaching lacks sufficient challenge, and thus hinders pupils' learning.
- In 2017, disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 made faster progress in reading than other pupils nationally. This was not the case in writing and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils currently in the school are making similar rates of progress as their peers, across the curriculum. There are strong examples of disadvantaged pupils making rapid progress in writing with the help of one-to-one tuition funded by the pupil premium. Leaders regularly review their strategy to see what is working well and what could be done even better. The new 'Triple A Plan' that focuses on attainment, attitudes and aspirations is carefully monitored by governors.
- Leaders identified that pupils' weak spelling skills contributed towards the disappointing outcomes in the key stage 2 grammar, punctuation and spelling test in 2017. The determined focus on improving spelling that is evident throughout the school and in all subjects, not just in English, is beginning to work. There are many positive examples of pupils becoming confident and accurate spellers as a result of support and challenge from teachers. However, some teaching still holds pupils back in terms of their writing outcomes.
- There has been a concerted effort to teach phonics systematically to all Year 3 pupils when they join the school. Those pupils who have fallen behind in reading are provided with extra support to help them catch up. However, these pupils are not supported well enough to choose appropriate reading material that matches their reading ability. This slows their progress. Class-based teaching of reading (including phonics), additional support for those who are falling behind, and

individual reading are not planned in a joined-up and logical way.

- Governors are keen that the curriculum should be interesting, give pupils a wide range of memorable experiences and prepare them well for the future. This has certainly been achieved. The curriculum improves pupils' knowledge in a wide range of subjects well. In some subjects, such as science, pupils' practical skills are starting to develop well. However, planning in some areas of the curriculum is not always well thought out. The assistant headteachers oversee the curriculum and pupils' progression so that work is only rarely repeated. However, all leaders recognise that there is further improvement needed to planning and assessment in some subject areas to help pupils to make rapid progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the current work to improve spelling in English and the development of problem-solving and reasoning skills in mathematics are accelerated, by tackling the few remaining inconsistencies in teaching, so that pupils make rapid progress to achieve their full potential
- the teaching of reading and phonics is reviewed so that those pupils who join the school with low prior attainment in reading have a consistent, well-planned programme to help them catch up quickly
- work to develop pupils' skills and understanding in subjects other than English and mathematics is strengthened and proportionate assessment systems are developed to enable pupils to make rapid progress
- their relentless focus on improving rates of attendance for all groups of pupils continues.

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

Yours sincerely

Lee Selby
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, we observed learning in classes and spoke to pupils, during three learning walks, about their work. I met with you and other senior leaders throughout the day to discuss your self-evaluation, curriculum, safeguarding and pupil premium funding. Together, with a group of six senior and middle leaders, I looked at a wide range of pupils' work. I met with four members of the governing body including the chair, and held a telephone conversation with a representative of

the local authority. A wide range of school documentation was scrutinised. I considered 16 responses to the confidential staff questionnaire and 41 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View.