

29 January 2018

Mr Matthew Try
Headteacher
Downham Market, Hillcrest Primary School
Hillcrest
Bexwell Road
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Dear Mr Try

Short inspection of Downham Market, Hillcrest Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 16 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 September 2013.

This school continues to be good.

You have successfully ensured that the leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You enjoy the confidence of parents and carers, most of whom would recommend the school to others. One parent typically wrote: 'My child is happy and making good progress. This is a fantastic school.' You are providing good leadership, working with your dedicated team of teachers and teaching assistants to maintain a successful and effective team. As a result, staff morale is high, which is reflected in their questionnaire responses. The school has continued to improve through effective and purposeful leadership, including that of governors. You have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Leaders use this information well to identify clear priorities for improvement. The governing body provides appropriate challenge and support for the school and governors visit the school regularly to form their own view of the school's work. They use the information from their visits to commend leaders and challenge them on the quality of education provided. They are clearly ambitious for the success of every pupil.

The curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well, including their understanding of British values. Pupils celebrate different world festivals and deepen their understanding of other faiths. They learn about the importance of protecting the environment and they democratically elect representatives on the school council. Pupils have many opportunities for enrichment through a wide range of after-school clubs, in which they eagerly participate. They are rightly proud of the school choir's strong reputation for singing

in the community. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is very good. They are polite and courteous to visitors and show respect for staff and other pupils in the school. They have very positive attitudes to learning and share their ideas enthusiastically to support each other's learning.

Leadership has ensured good teaching across the school, which is enabling pupils to learn effectively and make good progress. Pupils across the school are developing their reading, writing and mathematics well and as a result, pupils at both key stages achieved significantly above the national average in 2017. At key stage 2, pupils achieved significantly above the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics and the proportion who achieved greater depth was above the national average. You accurately judge the achievement of children in the early years and phonics teaching as strengths of the school. For the past two years, Reception children have reached good levels of development significantly above the national average. There has also been a clear upward trend over the past two years in the proportion of pupils exceeding the required standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check. Nevertheless, despite these clear strengths, pupils with low prior attainment at key stage 1 have not achieved as well across all subjects as other groups of pupils. Their progress was significantly below other pupils nationally in 2016 and in 2017. Currently, the progress of this group of pupils remains weaker than other groups because the teaching team in Year 1 is the least experienced in the school. Pupils with low prior attainment across the school, including those identified with special educational needs, do not usually make the same progress as other groups of pupils because the effectiveness of support for these pupils is too variable.

You and your leaders take effective action where you identify improvements required. You have addressed well the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. You successfully raised achievement in writing at key stage 1 and have taken effective actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning across the school. You have also ensured that subject leaders are regularly checking the progress of pupils across the school. You and your leaders know that more work needs to be done to raise the achievement of low prior attaining pupils so they make the same good progress as other groups of pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

You are developing a strong culture for safeguarding because you have made sure that keeping pupils safe is central to the work of the school. Pupils told me how they felt safe and well cared for at the school. They said that bullying is rare and understand that many forms of bullying can take place. Pupils play safely in the playground and move safely around the school. Pupils are very aware of the possible dangers of the internet and know how to keep safe when online. I saw them handling equipment and using computers safely in lessons. Nearly all parents who responded to Parent View stated that their children were safe, happy and well looked after at school.

You ensure that all necessary checks on staff are carried out and recorded

appropriately. Leaders, including governors, ensure that all safeguarding procedures are effective. You act quickly and effectively when pupils are in need of support.

Inspection findings

- One of my key lines of enquiry, to ascertain that the school remained good, was about low attaining pupils' achievements across the curriculum at key stage 1. These pupils have not made enough progress in reading, writing, mathematics and science. School information on pupils' progress shows that pupils with low prior attainment in Year 2 are making much better progress than similar pupils in Year 1.
- Pupils' work seen in their books shows this group is beginning to make good progress across all subjects. However, in Year 1, their progress in handwriting, mathematics and science is slower than in Year 2. Pupils at key stage 1 are reading with confidence. Most pupils could read their own handwriting.
- I also wanted to determine how effective support was for pupils with low prior attainment, including those pupils identified with special educational needs, in reading at key stage 2. This was because the national results showed that this group of pupils were not doing as well as other groups of pupils with similar starting points. In the majority of lessons visited, teaching assistants provided effective support for these pupils, making good use of phonics to support their reading. Usually, they ensured that pupils were using appropriate texts to read, although a small number of these pupils were given non-fiction texts which they found too difficult.
- The strategies leaders have put in place to establish reading as the heart of the school's curriculum is beginning to have a positive effect in encouraging reluctant readers, especially boys, to read. Nevertheless, in a few lessons at key stage 2, the support provided for reading was variable.
- Pupils who were struggling with reading in lessons delivered by less experienced teachers were not always provided with the most effective support. Occasionally, pupils identified with special educational needs are given reading books which are too difficult and this slows their progress.
- My final line of enquiry was about how well subject leaders are contributing to the raising of standards because at the previous inspection this was identified as an area for development. Subject leaders have developed their roles well since the last inspection. They have carried out audits of their areas of responsibility and put clear action plans in place to raise standards by improving teaching and learning within their subjects. They are now monitoring the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress through lesson visits and by looking at pupils' work. They are then linking these outcomes with the school's information about the progress pupils are making over time. Subject leaders have used the information from their monitoring to put effective strategies in place to improve the teaching of reading, writing, mathematics and science. They have also provided training for staff and workshops for parents in how to support their child's learning. All leaders rightly recognise the need to do more to strengthen teaching at key stage 1 and to strengthen support for pupils who find reading difficult at key

stage 2.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching for pupils with low prior attainment in Year 1 across all subjects is improved so that they make at least the same progress as other groups of pupils and reach the standards expected for their age
- pupils who are struggling with reading in lessons benefit from effective support.

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

Declan McCarthy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held meetings with you, senior and subject leaders and the chair of governors. I had a telephone discussion with a representative of the local authority. I visited a range of classes in the early years and across key stages 1 and 2 jointly with senior leaders. I looked at the work in pupils' books and examined the school's tracking information about the progress pupils are making. I met formally with a group of pupils and spoke with other pupils informally in classrooms and during breaktime and lunchtime. I looked at a range of documentation, including: the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans; policies and procedures for safeguarding, attendance figures and records of behaviour; minutes of governing body meetings; curriculum plans; and the school's website. I considered the views of 76 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the 36 text responses of parents. I also took account of the 33 staff and 45 pupil online questionnaire returns.