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Mrs Kate Hodgetts
Headteacher
St Helen's Primary School
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Dear Mrs Hodgetts

Short inspection of St Helen's Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 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 March 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

St Helen's Primary School is a nurturing school that enables its pupils to achieve well regardless of their backgrounds. At the heart of this academy is a strongly shared commitment to inclusion and equality of opportunity. You, as headteacher, work hard to ensure that your staff welcome and value all pupils. You have a clear and accurate understanding of current school performance and are fully aware of the many areas of strength as well as those aspects that require further work. As a result, you, your senior team and other leaders are working on the right aspects to improve the school further. The school's action plan is precise, and leaders, including the governing body and multi-academy trust, monitor each action carefully to ensure that it is bringing about the necessary changes.

You have adeptly maintained the ethos of the school as a caring and inclusive community. Parents and carers especially appreciate the extra support and care given to those pupils who may struggle or have English as an additional language. One parent stated, 'Both my sons thrive at the school and the staff are extremely dedicated and caring.' Another parent spoke for many when saying, 'Overall, I think that St Helen's is an excellent school and I am very happy that my daughter is being taught there.'

Since your appointment in January 2017, you have improved the school in a number of key aspects. You and your staff have improved the way that you monitor and track pupils' progress. As a result, teachers have a greater

understanding of what assessment reveals about pupils' attainment and progress. They have become instrumental in organising intervention programmes alongside senior members of staff. These programmes are having a positive impact on pupils' progress. After several staff changes, you now have a more stable staffing team. This is enabling you to appoint leaders for specific subjects other than English and mathematics. As a result, several subject leaders are new in post and we agreed that their work in monitoring their areas of responsibilities is not yet fully embedded. You agreed that pupils are not spending enough time developing their key skills in some subjects and this area requires further work.

Teachers use their subject knowledge confidently to prepare interesting and stimulating work. As a result, current pupils, regardless of ability and background, make good progress as they move through the school. The progress pupils make in their writing is particularly strong. However, teachers do not have a consistently high expectation of what pupils are capable of achieving where teaching is not as strong. Where this is the case, progress of pupils is not as positive in some areas of the school curriculum.

Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. You value the support and challenge that they provide, which has been instrumental in ensuring that the school continues to be good. You and your leadership team, very well supported by the multi-academy trust, are focused on continual improvement. Staff work hard to make sure that all groups of pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged and those who have English as an additional language, receive a good quality of education.

Pupils behave extremely well throughout the school day, both in lessons and around the school. They are polite and courteous to each other, as well as to staff and visitors. Pupils stated that behaviour is good in their school and that the staff make sure that learning always takes place.

Safeguarding is effective.

A strong culture of safeguarding is evident in the school. Leaders take their responsibilities extremely seriously, ensuring that policies, practice and procedures meet all statutory requirements. This includes the safe recruitment of staff and volunteers.

Staff know and understand what they should do if they have concerns about pupils. Your staff carefully record any concerns and follow them up rigorously to ensure that no pupil comes to harm. Where necessary, leaders work very well with external agencies to safeguard pupils' welfare and ensure that vulnerable pupils and their families receive the support they need.

Pupils feel safe in school. They say that their teachers are kind, very supportive and look after them well. The overwhelming majority of parents agree with their children. Pupils enjoy coming to school and their attendance is improving. However, you recognise you have more to do to ensure that this improves further.

Inspection findings

- To establish that the school remains good, one of my lines of enquiry was to consider how effective leaders have been in improving the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils. There was a dip in progress in the national tests in 2017 at key stage 2 and outcomes were not as good as expected for disadvantaged pupils. I spoke to a group of pupils, monitored their work in books and observed learning in lessons. Guidance given by your staff is instrumental in the strong progress in pupils' work over time. I was pleased to see that, as a result of your hard work, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is now higher than in previous years and is now in line with that of their peers across the school.
- You use pupil premium funding effectively to help pupils' achievement, including one-to-one teaching and small intervention groups, which helps those who are falling behind to catch up. Pupils commented that they appreciate 'prescription/misconception time', as it helps them 'to be educated'. Leaders and governors regularly assess the impact of the pupil premium fund to make sure that the many disadvantaged pupils are making as much progress as their peers. Those pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are very well supported and make good progress.
- My next line of enquiry was focused on pupils' attendance and what actions leaders are taking to halt the decline in attendance over recent years. We discussed recent initiatives that you have introduced that are having a positive impact on different groups of your school community. In particular, we focused on the work of the family liaison worker. You and your governors are aware of the importance of good attendance and regularly monitor attendance and follow up absence. Currently, pupils' attendance is higher than at the same time in previous years for the majority of pupils, in particular for the growing number of pupils who have English as an additional language (95.25% compared to 92.47%). However, you recognise that there is still more work to do to improve the overall attendance for all pupils, especially for the group who are persistently absent from school.
- Another key line of enquiry centred on teachers' expectations to ensure that more pupils in key stage 1 achieve the higher than expected standard. Evidence in books shows that pupils receive advice and suggestions that support the positive progress being made, especially for writing. Your assessment information shows that an increased number of pupils are likely to reach the higher than expected standard, and inspection findings support this view. Your staff, throughout the school, ask detailed questions that probe and extend pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. As a result, pupils are encouraged to explain their reasoning and thoughts, which is having a positive impact on progress being made.
- You recognise that teachers' expectations of what pupils could achieve, both in individual lessons and over time, although generally high need to be consistently so. There has been improved teaching of English and mathematics as a result of raising staff awareness of expectations. However, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve, in particular the most able pupils in key stage 1 and in some subjects in the lower half of key stage 2, varies across the school.

- My final line of enquiry focused on how well leaders are ensuring that the increase in outcomes at key stage 2 continues. The percentage of pupils reaching the expected standard in 2017 for reading, writing and mathematics was higher than in 2016 and in line with national averages. We looked at pupils' books, observed pupils' learning and looked at your school current assessment information. We agreed that pupils are making good progress from their different starting points, and more are on track to reach the expected standard in all three areas than in previous years. This is because the teaching in upper key stage 2 is consistently strong and the expectation of what pupils can achieve is high.
- Teachers use resources well and deploy teaching assistants effectively to support those who need additional help with their learning. Staff have benefited from improved arrangements for their own professional development. More systematic monitoring and assessment have sharpened teachers' awareness of what pupils should be achieving, and this is a key factor in the improving outcomes on display.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the recent trend of improvements in attendance continues, especially for the group of pupils who are persistently absent
- teachers have a consistently high expectation of what pupils can achieve in order for pupils to reach their potential
- subject leaders ensure that skills are being fully embedded into their areas of responsibilities so that pupils spend more time developing key skills, in particular for subjects such as art and history.

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

Yours sincerely

Joseph Figg
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with you and your senior leadership team, a school governor and had a telephone conversation with a representative from ASSET Education, the multi-academy trust that the school belongs to. I spoke to a group of pupils and individual pupils around the school.

We made visits to lessons to observe pupils' learning and took a learning walk around the school. We also looked at pupils' books across a range of ages and

abilities as well as information from the school's assessment system.

I scrutinised a range of documentary evidence, which included the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan, current progress information and pupil attendance information. I evaluated safeguarding referrals and child protection records, including the single central record. I also looked at the school's website.

In addition, I took account of 89 responses to the Parent View online survey.