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7 March 2018

Mr Edward Pearson-Shaul
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Pearson-Shaul

Short inspection of Saxmundham Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 February 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 July 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Ably supported by your senior leaders and governors, you have achieved some significant improvements. Standards in early years have risen steadily over a four-year period, and children's good level of development now matches the national average. From starting points below what is typical, this represents good progress. In key stage 2, pupils' progress and attainment in reading, writing and mathematics have increased consistently. Standards in all areas are now in line with national averages and are on an upward trajectory. Your three 'Thrive' practitioners work effectively to help meet pupils' social and emotional needs, helping them to manage their behaviour better and become more ready and open to learning. You continue to develop leadership at all levels, and staff monitor and evaluate standards across the school closely, acting upon the findings to develop and improve the school further.

I noticed immediately the calm, friendly and inviting feel of the school. Staff are dedicated, professional and focused on improving outcomes for all pupils. You and your governors know your school well, and assess the school's effectiveness accurately. This gives you a useful baseline to carry out further improvements. The key lines of enquiry for this inspection mirrored the school's main priorities in your action plan, and came as no surprise to you. You have addressed these issues quickly, and the early signs indicate that your improvements are working: pupils are making better progress. You know that, as the year progresses, leaders will need to make regular checks to ensure that they remain effective.

Since the last inspection, you have worked effectively with the local authority and other schools to improve provision. The support you have received has been well focused and has led to significant improvements. Leaders spoke very positively about the help they had received, especially in key stage 1, and how this has strengthened key aspects of the school's provision. You have achieved this while developing staff and keeping morale high. The staff survey responses were very positive. Almost all respondents said they were proud to be a member of staff at this school, felt that all pupils are challenged to make at least good progress, and appreciated that leaders take staff workload into account when developing and implementing new policies. Some highlighted the positive impact the new marking policy has had on their work-life balance. This reflects the confidence that staff have in your leadership and management of the school.

You and your staff work hard to meet the wide range of needs of local families. You provide pupils with extensive experiences to complement the formal curriculum. Pupils are very polite and articulate. They display a real pride in their school and are eager to speak about their learning activities. Pupils value the many clubs that you provide, alongside the musical, sporting, and performing arts opportunities on offer. As one pupil said, 'We enjoy these and everyone takes part in a performance every year.' These activities highlight the inclusive and community-focused nature of the school, which parents and carers rate most positively. One comment typified the sentiment of many: 'Staff work hard and encourage all children to achieve their potential whilst enjoying their learning and motivating them to be inquisitive.'

Governors know their school well. They are aware of the school's strengths and areas for development because they are well informed about the progress that different groups of pupils make. They are passionate and committed, and bring a wide range of valuable experience and desirable skills. They value the inclusive, compassionate nature of the school, and know that the wider curriculum helps produce well-rounded pupils ready for the next stage of their education. They work well with you and your leaders, and increasingly ask testing questions to assure themselves that you are working effectively to address issues quickly.

Safeguarding is effective.

All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The designated safeguarding lead carries out annual training for all staff to keep them abreast of the latest statutory guidance. Staff are aware of and understand the potential risks to children's safety, and follow the school's systems well. They heed your advice and 'if in doubt report it'. The single central record of checks on adults employed at the school is accurate and very well maintained, and the regular audits that you carry out, including checks by the link governor for safeguarding, ensure that it contains all the required pre-employment information.

The school's referral systems work effectively to ensure that staff safeguard pupils, including the most vulnerable pupils. Your safeguarding records are detailed and informative. You work effectively with external agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils and their families access the support they need. Where child protection issues

exist, you are aware of the link between non-attendance and safeguarding and follow up any absences quickly. A study of case files showed that your timely and appropriate actions have helped to protect pupils.

Pupils said that they feel safe in school because 'if you don't feel safe, adults will help you, and everyone is very friendly here'. They know about potential risks, including 'stranger danger' and internet safety measures. Children in the lower school are taught early that 'this is your body and no one can touch it without your permission'. Pupils say that bullying is dealt with well, because they follow the 'three strikes rule', which involves telling the bully to stop before telling an adult. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to Parent View said that their children feel safe and are well looked after.

Inspection findings

- Pupils arrive at the school from many different backgrounds and with a range of different starting points. While standards in early years and key stage 2 have shown steady improvement, the proportion of pupils successfully achieving the national average in the Year 1 phonics check fell sharply last year. Also, in writing and mathematics, not enough pupils achieved the expected standard or better by the age of six. In addition, the school's overall attendance dipped below the national average last year, including lower attendance for some groups of pupils. Therefore, we agreed that my key lines of enquiry would focus on these areas and how leaders have brought about improvements.
- Your self-evaluation of the school's strengths and priorities is accurate. Your action plans for improvement cover all of the areas mentioned in the key lines of enquiry. You provided useful explanations and evidence about why some outcomes had dipped, and the actions you have taken since, and the positive impact these are starting to show.
- You have looked closely at last year's phonics results. Your phonics improvement plan has led to revised approaches and a greater consistency in the teaching of phonics across groups, including the order in which phonemes are taught. Groupings are now more closely linked to ability, irrespective of age, meaning teaching is more specific to pupils' needs. Your close monitoring of pupils' progress, and more diagnostic use of results, allows you to react quickly to pupils' changing needs. The key stage 1 leader, in post since September 2016, has spent useful time with the link governor and the standards-and-excellence officer from the local authority reviewing your progress against the plan. Early evidence, including your December screening check, suggests that your actions are helping pupils make better progress, and next year's figures for Year 1, and the Year 2 retests, are likely to be more in line with national averages.
- In key stage 1, you have reviewed assessment and marking processes, especially in mathematics. Teachers' lesson objectives are now matched more closely to pupils' needs. The success criteria allow pupils to understand more easily what they are required to do. Your fortnightly skills checks enable teachers to be more adept at picking up pupils' misconceptions because they understand what pupils know and can do. This helps you to track pupils' progress more closely and

provide meaningful support if they fall behind. You acknowledge that more work needs to be done to enable pupils to develop their numeracy skills further, so that a greater proportion achieve the expected standard or better in mathematics by the end of Year 2.

- Pupils across all year groups work diligently. Year 6 mathematicians showed a deep understanding of how to apply their mathematical skills due to the good quality of teaching they receive. While pupils in Years 1 and 2 listen to instructions carefully and concentrate hard, the work in their books is not currently challenging enough for more to achieve greater depth.
- Teachers in key stage 1 are now planning next steps collaboratively to help pupils develop their writing skills. For some pupils, the quality of writing is not as high as it should be for their age and capabilities. Teachers are giving pupils more opportunities to write at length, and edit and redraft their work so it improves. The greater collaboration between classes is helping teachers understand the exact requirements of where pupils are when they arrive and where they need to be when they leave. Teachers need to continue to encourage pupils to write more neatly and precisely so that they develop their literacy skills across the curriculum.
- Your fortnightly moderation of pupils' writing is helping to secure a greater consistency across classes. Alongside leaders and governors' increased monitoring, this ensures that teachers' assessments are more accurate and shows the positive impact your actions are having. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can do is increasing, but more challenge is required to ensure that pupils achieve at greater depth. The school's latest assessment information confirms that pupils are making far better progress.
- Another area that I focused on was attendance. Last year, overall attendance fell below the national average, with the persistent absence of some vulnerable groups of pupils being worse than the national average. Inspection evidence showed that attendance has improved significantly. You have successfully raised the profile of attendance among parents through your effective 'traffic light' letter system. The 'Thrive' programme has helped to identify some of the root causes of poor attendance. Providing this additional support has helped pupils, especially those with complex needs, to manage their behaviour and attend better. This nurturing and caring environment helps pupils with additional needs settle more quickly, receive more support, and enjoy learning more.
- You have also sought to improve parental engagement with the school, through activities such as the 'mouse project', an art exhibition, reading cafes, the wide range of clubs, and regular productions. Alongside your active work with other agencies to ensure that pupils receive the extra help they need, you have raised pupils' attendance significantly. The school's overall attendance figure for this term is now above last year's national average, and the current attendance figures for all groups of pupils has improved markedly.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- embed the recent changes to phonics teaching, and continue to monitor pupils' progress closely so that more pupils achieve the national average in the phonics screening check
- ensure that teachers set work closely matched to pupils' needs to increase the number of pupils reaching the expected standard or better in writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 1.

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

John Randall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, your senior leaders, the head of key stage 1, school office personnel, and six representatives of the governing body. I also held a telephone conversation with the standards-and-excellence officer from the local authority. I gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included observations of teaching and learning in every class, jointly with you. I evaluated pupils' current work across all subjects and over a wide range of abilities. I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including your self-evaluation, the school's plans for continued improvement, school assessment information, and documents relating to attendance.

I spoke informally with pupils during lessons and met formally with them to consider their views. I also took account of the 18 pupil responses to the online questionnaire. Policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils were examined, including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff and case studies about referrals made to external agencies. A discussion was held with you as the designated safeguarding lead.

I took account of the 27 parent responses that were provided during the inspection time to the online survey, Parent View, and 22 free-text comments. The views of staff were considered from the 24 responses to the staff online questionnaire.