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Mrs Lucy Carroll
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Dear Mrs Carroll

Short inspection of Meredith Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 27 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 December 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and the deputy headteacher have a very clear vision for the school which is shared by all staff and governors. Teachers and support staff all strive for pupils to be successful learners, responsible citizens and happy, confident individuals. The school is underpinned by strong, respectful, professional relationships, which senior leaders see as 'the pinnacle of a successful community'. Morale in the school is high. All who responded to the staff questionnaire said that they are proud to be a part of the school team and enjoy working at the school.

Pupils are enthusiastic, polite and hard-working, with very positive attitudes to learning. They talk keenly about their school and the high aspirations that staff have. One pupil confirmed this and told me that 'all teachers encourage us to try our hardest'. Learning heroes such as 'Tough Turtle' help to develop such qualities as determination and resilience. Several pupils gave examples of how these characters had enabled them to keep trying and not to give up. Parents explained how pupils who had recently moved on to the junior school still found that the lessons learned from these characters helped them in their new school. Pupils' behaviour is good, both in lessons and in free times around the school. Pupils are happy, friendly and quick to offer a cheerful welcome to visitors.

You have spared no effort to engage with parents, who are full of praise for the school. They especially appreciate the way that staff go out of their way to keep parents informed and explain how parents can help pupils continue their learning at

home.

At your last inspection, inspectors asked leaders to improve pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics. In particular, they asked for teachers to check on pupils' progress during lessons and to intervene to add support or greater challenge. Teachers plan sequences of lessons based on accurate assessments of pupils' learning. Lessons build on skills and knowledge so that pupils achieve well. Staff check regularly that pupils understand the work and offer support and greater challenge where they are needed, adapting the task where it is needed. Pupils enjoy challenges and are confident when approaching them. One pupil told me, 'You always need a challenge.' However, you recognise that there is still work to be done to ensure that pupils achieve as well in writing as in other subjects.

Inspectors also asked leaders to strengthen the systems for gathering information about the work of the school and ensure that it is analysed thoroughly. Senior leaders and governors know the school well, because they draw evidence from a range of sources and check its accuracy thoroughly. You and the deputy headteacher have developed systems for collecting and analysing detailed information about the achievement of groups of pupils. Leaders also regularly use the latest research to find the most effective ways of helping pupils to make good progress. All new initiatives and interventions are evaluated thoroughly to ensure that they are having the desired effect and to plan further improvements.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils are safe, because senior leaders place the well-being of pupils at the heart of the school's work. Pupils feel safe in school and trust adults to take care of them. Staff understand that pupils come to the school with many different needs and that some are vulnerable. Senior leaders have a strong grasp on the needs and vulnerabilities of each pupil, and spare no effort to keep them safe.

All staff understand their important role in keeping pupils safe because you ensure that they receive the right training and up-to-date information about child protection. Staff have a good understanding of the signs that may indicate a child is at risk and report their concerns promptly. People who work with children understand that even minor worries need to be recorded because they may later contribute to a fuller picture. Senior leaders ensure that they engage tenaciously with external agencies and other sources of support for pupils who are vulnerable.

You ensure that the right checks are carried out on people before they can work in the school. However, senior leaders have not made sure that all the checks are collated into one central record, in line with government advice. While governors receive regular updates on the school's work to keep pupils safe, they have not checked that this central record of recruitment checks is maintained in line with statutory guidance.

Inspection findings

- During our initial meeting, we agreed to follow three lines of enquiry. The first was to do with the effectiveness of the teaching of writing in key stage 1. In 2017, pupils achieved less well in writing than in other subjects and below the national average. Teachers place a strong emphasis on enabling pupils to talk about their ideas before starting to write. Leaders have fostered a shared agreement that teaching should lead to pupils becoming more articulate and capable speakers so that they can become more confident writers. The curriculum provides pupils with many exciting learning opportunities. New experiences and visits to interesting places such as Arundel Castle and Chichester Harbour provide pupils with memorable experiences. A farm also visits the school, enabling pupils to meet and pet animals. These experiences give all pupils something to talk and write about.
- Teachers use accurate assessments of pupils' learning to plan sequences of lessons to ensure that pupils have the right skills and knowledge needed to be successful. Starting with the end in mind, staff teach aspects of grammar, punctuation and spelling in a timely fashion so that pupils have these to hand when they need them in their writing.
- The leader of English has a strong grasp on how well pupils achieve in writing and has prepared a suitable action plan to drive forward improvements in writing. She has identified the right groups of pupils to target for further improvement, including boys and disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, most pupils are making good progress in writing. However, the proportions of pupils on track to achieve at least the expected standard at the end of Year 1 and Year 2 are still below those in reading and mathematics and are below the national average.
- We also agreed to investigate how well teaching in the early years meets the needs of boys, so that they make good progress and get off to a good start in school. Many children start school with skills below those typical for their age, but make good progress and achieve in line with national figures. However, boys have not achieved as well as girls at the end of the early years in recent years, and leaders have made them an area for improvement.
- Boys of all ability levels currently in the early years are making good progress. Teaching is well matched to the needs of individual children. Leaders ensure that the curriculum grabs boys' interest and encourages them to develop positive attitudes to learning. Many of the topics are designed to specifically spark boys' curiosity. Boys quickly become enthusiastic learners who enjoy school, behave well and concentrate on their learning for quite long periods. Staff understand that some boys struggle with writing because they are not ready to hold a pencil. Teachers have a detailed understanding of how to nurture boys' physical development, moving from making sure that there is strength in their arms to teaching them how to hold a pencil properly. The teaching of phonics is thorough, precise and rigorous. Teachers pay great attention to detail, including making sure that boys who struggle have the right level of support to learn well. Staff practise new and unfamiliar sounds rigorously with children, including boys, insisting that they make the right sound and match it to the correct letter. Where necessary, staff use reinforcement to practise and secure knowledge of

letters and sounds, providing boys with a secure foundation to become successful learners.

- The last line of enquiry explored leaders' and governors' use of the pupil premium funding. Senior leaders are constantly looking for ways to enable disadvantaged pupils to achieve as well as other pupils. However, you recognise that in recent years the attainment of disadvantaged pupils has lagged behind that of other pupils. Plans for accelerating the progress of disadvantaged pupils accurately identify the barriers that prevent these pupils from achieving as well as others. Leaders provide a wide range of opportunities and interventions to help overcome these barriers. Together with governors, you evaluate the impact of this additional help rigorously and make any adjustments needed. You rightly place a high priority on ensuring that pupils have the right support to secure their social and emotional well-being, because it gives them a strong foundation for making strong progress in the future.
- In a drive to find new ways of accelerating progress, leaders commissioned a review of the use of the pupil premium from an external consultant. This report echoed leaders' findings that disadvantaged pupils who have more complex needs or multiple barriers to learning, such as poor attendance or special educational needs do not achieve as well and make less progress than other pupils with the same starting points. Teachers have high expectations of disadvantaged pupils and many disadvantaged pupils achieve well. Evidence in pupils' books confirms this. Disadvantaged pupils in Year 1 are attaining at a higher level than those in Year 2, and in some instances are outperforming their peers.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they regularly monitor the records of pre-employment checks on staff and volunteers to ensure that these records are kept in line with government guidelines and reflect the high-quality safeguarding practice in the school
- pupils, including boys, achieve at least in line with national expectations in writing.

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

Yours sincerely

Bruce Waelend
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the deputy headteacher, other leaders and four members of the governing body. I spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone. Together we visited all the classes in the school to look at teaching and learning. We looked at pupils' work during these visits. I met with the leader of English, who is also responsible for the early years. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school and had a meeting with a group of 12 pupils from Years 1 and 2. The pupil survey, which had 162 responses, was also taken into account. I considered 23 responses to the staff survey and 13 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including six written comments. I spoke to several parents at the beginning of the day. A range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation documents, pupil tracking information and development plan, were reviewed during the inspection. I also examined the school's safeguarding policies, procedures and checks.