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Miss Jane Loader
Headteacher
St Helens Primary School
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Dear Miss Loader

Short inspection of St Helens Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 March 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 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 senior teacher, make an effective team. You have developed a welcoming and positive atmosphere in which pupils are safe and happy. Pupils told me they enjoy school and said that lessons were fun. They described their teachers as 'kind'.

The inspection in 2014 asked that you improve the teaching and assessment of mathematics. You told me about the training that staff have received to improve the teaching of mathematics and their ability to check the progress of pupils. You are pleased with the impact of this training. Pupils now talk confidently about their learning in mathematics and know what they need to do to improve.

You have welcomed the good support from the local authority to develop the role of subject leaders, in particular those responsible for leading English and mathematics. You now make sure that middle leaders play a full part in school improvement.

You have shown dedication to improving the school still further. You have embraced the effective support provided by the local authority and this has helped you to ensure that the school continues to improve. You recognise that there is more to be done to make sure that teaching consistently provides the challenge that pupils need in order to make the rapid progress of which they are capable.

The large majority of parents and carers I spoke to during the inspection, or who

responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, are supportive of the work of the school. One comment typified the view of many: 'The teachers not only know every child, but they care about them too.' However, a small minority of parents have some concerns, especially about pupils' behaviour. The inspection found that pupils behave well in lessons and work hard. They play happily in the playground and value their friendships.

Governors are supportive and committed to the school. They take their responsibilities seriously and play an important role to ensure that the school continues to improve.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Effective checks are made on all adults working in the school and visitors are vetted appropriately. Staff place an appropriately high emphasis on pupils' safety and well-being. You are particularly pleased with the partnerships you have forged with local agencies which help to keep pupils safe.

You make sure that all staff and governors receive effective, timely training. As a result, staff know what to do if they have any concerns or issues relating to pupils' safety or welfare. Staff know the pupils well. Relationships across the school are strong. All the pupils I spoke to said that they feel safe in school and know they can talk to an adult if they feel worried. Pupils know the importance of keeping safe when using computers or when they are by the sea.

You have worked hard to raise parents' awareness of the need for their children to attend school regularly. However, while the attendance of pupils has recently improved, rates of attendance for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities remain too low.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed to focus on: how well disadvantaged pupils are achieving; how effectively the teaching of writing supports pupils' strong progress in key stages 1 and 2; how well school leaders responded to pupils' slow progress in key stage 2 in reading and mathematics; and the effectiveness of safeguarding.
- You, and your staff, know the small number of disadvantaged pupils in each class well. You are careful to keep a check on the progress they make. Around half of all disadvantaged pupils joined at times other than at the start of the year. You make sure that they settle quickly into school life. Evidence in pupils' books shows that, overall, disadvantaged pupils currently in school make good progress.
- You were disappointed with the standards in writing that pupils reached at the end of Year 6 in 2017. In partnership with the local authority, you have taken swift action. The inspection found that pupils now develop neat handwriting and

increasingly accurate spelling.

- Teachers make learning fun and this encourages pupils to write interesting pieces. During the inspection, pupils were keen to write play scripts from the story of the 'Sword in the Stone'. Older pupils showed confidence when using a wide vocabulary to write diary entries, after reading about Ernest Shackleton. Pupils' books show that these types of motivating activities are typical.
- Pupils generally make good progress in writing. However, at times, pupils are not challenged to practise their skills and develop their ideas in longer pieces of writing. This sometimes slows their progress.
- You have worked hard, alongside other school leaders, to make sure that pupils make the progress they should in reading and mathematics in key stage 2. Actions have included providing additional training for staff, introducing more challenging books to read in class, and revising the mathematics curriculum to ensure that more emphasis is given to developing pupils' number skills. You are not complacent and make frequent checks to make sure that these actions result in improvements in pupils' achievement.
- The inspection found that pupils' progress in reading and mathematics is mostly good. However, teaching does not consistently provide the appropriate level of challenge for pupils. As a result, pupils do not make the rapid progress they could.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- learning activities provide sufficient challenge for all groups of pupils, so that pupils make consistently high rates of progress and more reach the highest levels of which they are capable
- attendance rates improve, especially for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanna Toulson
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you at the beginning of the day to agree our focus for the inspection. Most of the inspection activities were carried out jointly with you or your senior teacher. I met with representatives of the governing body, including the chair of governors. I spoke on the telephone with the local authority representative who has worked with your school. I spoke to parents at the start of the school day and took account of the 25 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the free-text responses. I spoke to pupils in class and during lunchtime, as well as with a group to capture their views of school life. I looked at a range of documentation, including your school improvement plan, the school's single central record of staff recruitment checks, attendance information and a sample of minutes of governing body meetings.