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Miss Lisa Roberts
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Roberts

Short inspection of Sandridge School

Following my visit to the school on 13 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 April 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Since the previous inspection, the school has experienced significant changes in leadership, including governance, and staff. Initially, you were in post as an interim headteacher until October 2017, when your headship role became permanent. There are several new members of the teaching staff and some leaders are relatively new to their roles. As a result, this turbulence in staffing has slowed the pace of school improvement. Consequently, standards at the school have shown a decline in key stages 1 and 2. You have been very transparent about the position the school is in, and governors now have an accurate picture of the school's performance and work. Members of the governing body, many of whom are new since the previous inspection, understand the urgency required to consistently secure improvements in pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. You acknowledge that work is still underway to fully resolve the areas for improvement raised at the previous inspection.

Despite these challenges, children and pupils remain proud and enthusiastic learners who behave well throughout the school day. Relationships between adults and pupils are positive, caring and respectful. Pupils who have been at the school since Reception are appreciative of how well they feel their experiences at Sandridge have prepared them for the next stage of their education. Pupils are

articulate and passionate about their learning. For example, they were overwhelmingly in agreement that the computing opportunities, such as participating in the radio club, were 'amazing' and successfully equipped pupils with skills they say 'not every child has the chance to have'.

Parents and carers are equally complimentary about the work of leaders, governors and staff. They believe their children are safe, looked after and prepared well for their future. One parent summed up the views of others by commenting:

'There is a lovely community at the school that is welcoming and nurturing and every pupil is valued. Successes and achievements are celebrated, such as in assembly, and teachers all show great commitment. We are very happy parents!'

Specialist local authority advisers have provided a wealth of support in the early years, mathematics and English. For example, in the early years, you and the adviser identify that there is much work to be done to improve the learning environment. You and your staff have already been successfully working on this and are looking forward to the work that is due to take place. The support and advice from the new school improvement adviser are starting to support you to raise the achievement of children and pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

Upon starting at Sandridge, you successfully strengthened the safeguarding culture at the school. Staff recruitment and training are rigorous and meet statutory requirements. You make prompt referrals when necessary and work with a range of external agencies to support pupils' welfare. You rigorously follow up all concerns raised by staff and pupils to make sure that pupils are kept safe from potential harm. The leadership team, including governors, has successfully ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are watertight and fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of a high quality.

Your team fully appreciates the importance of attendance and how it links to safeguarding pupils. Over time, absence and persistent absence have been higher than the national average. You have very quickly put in place rigorous systems to ensure that attendance improves. You swiftly spot any concerning trends in pupils' absence and provide support to families and pupils. As a result, attendance is improving and persistent absence is decreasing.

Pupils are confident that the school teaches them how to stay safe, including when they are online or outside of school. Pupils say teachers respond to any concerns they have, and they feel confident to approach any adult at the school if they are worried. Pupils also suggest that bullying is rare and dealt with quickly and well. Parents confirm that they feel very happy leaving their children in the staff's care, knowing they will 'look after them as if they were their own'.

Inspection findings

- Prior to the inspection, I shared and agreed a number of lines of enquiry that would help me to ascertain whether the school was sustaining the 'good' judgement.
- One line of enquiry involved looking at the quality of teaching and learning in key stage 1, especially in phonics, reading and writing. This was because, in 2017, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading and writing was below the national average. Additionally, in 2017, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in the phonics screening check was also below the national average.
- You were disappointed with the 2017 key stage 1 outcomes but you are taking action to raise pupils' achievement. Both the reading and writing leaders are working together to secure better achievement for pupils in both of these areas. Coaching support by more experienced staff is being effectively used to improve the quality of teaching and this is beginning to make a difference.
- Your decision to take reading books into the classrooms has been a 'winner', according to pupils. They talked enthusiastically about the 'hobbit hole', the 'pyramid' and the other reading areas being created. Pupils' view was that they can read more freely as books are more readily available to them.
- Leaders know they have work to do to ensure that pupils' achievement in reading and writing quickly improves. You are paying particular attention to whether assessments are accurate and precise so that you know what each pupil's starting point is. You are then looking closely to ensure that teachers consistently plan lessons that accurately meet the needs of all pupils.
- The next aspect I explored was how leaders were securing better outcomes in mathematics across the school, particularly in key stage 2. In 2017, the progress pupils made from their starting points in mathematics was significantly below the national average. This has been the case over time.
- You and your leadership team continue to focus on developing teachers' subject knowledge and their accuracy in assessing pupils' current achievement. You are working with the local authority to secure improved teacher subject knowledge, including how to develop pupils' reasoning and the application of their mathematical skills to problem-solving. While there are areas of strength, work scrutiny shows that this is still a developing area and is not yet as consistent as you would like across the school. Consequently, teaching is not yet bringing rapid enough progress for pupils in every year group.
- A further area I focused upon was how leaders of the wider curriculum subjects contribute towards securing good provision and achievement across all areas of the curriculum. This aspect was an area to improve following the previous inspection.
- You and other leaders are currently working to ensure that there is a consistent and reliable system to assess pupils' achievements in all subjects. You also identify that pupils need more opportunities to apply their basic skills, particularly writing, in all subject areas. While subject leadership is developing, you have

identified that many of your leaders are new and their work is not yet fully embedded.

- I also reviewed your ongoing work to develop effective communication with parents because this was identified as an area to improve in your previous inspection. Parents enjoy the weekly newsletter and report that communication from the school is 'open', 'frequent' and 'forthcoming'. Parents' views were accurately captured by one parent saying:

'My children love school, the teachers work so hard to prepare wonderful learning experiences for them – and the kids are captivated. The door is always open and anything I have ever wanted to discuss has been listened to and dealt with appropriately.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- further develop the quality of teaching, especially teachers' use of assessment, so that pupils are well supported to achieve better outcomes, especially in reading and writing in key stage 1 and mathematics in key stage 2
- continue to increase the precision and rigour of subject leadership, including within the wider curriculum areas
- implement rigorous assessment processes in subjects other than mathematics and English
- further increase opportunities for pupils to apply their basic skills across all areas of the curriculum, particularly their extended writing skills
- continue the work in the early years to improve the learning environment so that it provides more high-quality learning experiences for children.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracy Fielding
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held meetings with you and your two assistant headteachers, who also lead reading and writing in both key stages 1 and 2. I met the leaders of mathematics, history, geography and art. Additionally, I met with

three governors, including the chair of governors, and two local authority representatives.

I visited all classes with you and, during this time, I looked through a wide range of pupils' workbooks. I also met with a group of pupils to talk to them about safety, behaviour and how they felt about their school experience.

We scrutinised documents related to the effectiveness of safeguarding, the capacity of leadership and management and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

The views of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account, as well as the 98 responses parents made using the free-text service. I also considered the written letters from parents during the inspection and the school's most recent parental survey. In addition, I looked at the 20 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey and the three responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.