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Miss Melanie Strachan
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Strachan

Short inspection of Seal Primary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment as substantive headteacher, in September 2016, you have worked together with the executive headteacher to raise teachers' expectations and bring greater consistency to the quality of teaching in the school. As a result, current pupils are now making more rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

Staff enjoy working for and with you to provide a good-quality education for the pupils of Seal Primary Academy. This is because staff find you supportive and approachable and feel you 'still understand the reality of teaching,' meaning that you can quickly assess how well new initiatives are working.

When the school was inspected in 2014, it had been through a period of great change and rapid improvement. It was graded 'good' with some aspects of the school being identified as being particularly strong. Soon after the inspection, The Kemnal Academies Trust (TKAT), a large multi-academy trust (MAT) to which your school belongs, began to deploy the previous headteacher's skills elsewhere in the trust. You became head of school and managed the day-to-day running of the school. During this interim period, the momentum of change slowed and initiatives that were put into place previously were given time to embed. Governors and directors from the MAT recognise this.

At the time of the previous inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that teachers checked what pupils were learning, and that pupils were always given tasks that

engaged and motivated them, particularly in writing. Since September 2016, you have tackled these areas with gusto and with very positive results. By introducing a whole-school approach that promotes writing by talking about stories and other texts, you have raised the profile of writing throughout the school. Pupils are enjoying their writing activities more. For example, I saw a group of Year 5 pupils enthused by the task of persuading people to take a holiday on a dilapidated ship. Pupils are also making faster progress in writing. This was shown by improvements in progress and attainment at the end of key stage 2 in 2017. While writing is now taught consistently in this way, you and your middle leaders recognise that there are some teachers who need additional support and coaching for their pupils to achieve the very best results for pupils.

In recent years, pupils have made slower progress through key stage 2 than other pupils nationally in reading and mathematics. Middle leaders have developed their capacity to bring about improvements with support from you and the executive headteacher. They have put in place new initiatives that started in September 2017 and are already having an impact on raising standards. However, more could still be done to track how pupils develop their knowledge, understanding and skills in reading and mathematics, and to consistently challenge the most able pupils.

All of the pupils I met are happy to come to school, enjoy their lessons and like their teachers. They find their work interesting and enjoy activities, such as learning to play brass instruments and studying on the nearby beach as part of the 'wild beach' curriculum. Most parents and carers are happy with the school; however, some parents do not fully understand what happens at school and worry about behaviour and bullying. I did not see any evidence of poor behaviour during my visit and the school's records show that incidents of poor behaviour are generally minor. Where pupils do find it difficult to manage their behaviour, you have put in place systems to help them successfully improve over time. We agreed that you could do more to communicate the many positive things that happen at Seal Primary Academy to parents more clearly.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You and the other designated safeguarding leads have a wealth of experience and expertise that allow you to fulfil your statutory duties well. You completely understand the unique characteristics of the community you serve and the potential risks to pupils.

Procedures to check staff recruitment, train staff and volunteers, and to share and record concerns, are all fully in place. You and your team work well with other professionals and with families. For example, your well-being leader works with the school nurse to offer a monthly drop-in for parents at a local café.

You have worked hard to help pupils, and their parents, understand how to stay safe online. More could be done to help pupils and parents fully understand the difference between unkind behaviour and bullying.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we focused on the teaching of reading, including phonics, throughout the school, and how leaders, governors and the multi-academy trust work together to make improvements to tackle weaknesses in the school.
- Outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check have been improving over time but fell again in 2017 to below the national average. This is despite the school using a well-established systematic synthetic phonics scheme. Leaders have refreshed the teaching of phonics in Reception Year and key stage 1 to inject more pace and greater challenge. Pupils are now expected to complete the programme much more quickly.
- During my visit, I observed high-quality phonics teaching delivered by skilled and knowledgeable staff. A fast pace was used to keep pupils engaged and links between reading and writing were made from the earliest stages. Most teachers monitored the progress their groups of pupils were making well and sometimes stretched pupils with sounds from the next stage of the programme to provide additional challenge. Children in early years and many pupils in Years 1 and 2 have individual reading books that are closely matched to their phonic ability and allow them to practise and apply the sounds they are using in lessons. The school's assessment information shows that more pupils are on track to meet the standard this year because of the much improved teaching.
- Over time, the progress that pupils make in reading during key stage 2 has been weak. Many pupils, and especially those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, have historically made slow progress from their starting points. A focus on getting pupils to reach the expected standard rather than developing their knowledge, skills and understanding further, regardless of their current attainment, has also slowed progress, especially for the most able. Teachers also report that many pupils found it difficult to structure written answers to test questions.
- Across the school, pupils' progress in reading, including in key stage 2, is improving. Attainment at the end of key stage 1 is already above the national average. Teachers are making much stronger links between reading and writing in lessons. The use of well-chosen class texts has exposed pupils to more challenging reading material and given them the confidence to try reading more challenging books. Pupils I spoke to about their reading were very enthused about the books they had read as a class and how this had inspired them to make informed choices about what to read themselves.
- Key stage 2 pupils choose independent reading books from a banded selection. They complete online quizzes to check their comprehension when they finish each book. While this system gives pupils access to a wide range of genres and authors, the approach does allow most-able pupils to choose books that are not challenging. Where teachers take the greatest interest in their pupils as readers, they help them to make wise choices and select from a wider range of fiction and non-fiction.
- The oversight and scrutiny of the school from both the MAT and local governing body have intensified in the last year or so. You and other leaders now feel

challenged as well as supported. The chair of governors has put in place well-thought-out systems and processes to strategically check all aspects of the school's performance. Together with other governors, he has the highest ambitions for the school's future.

- The executive headteacher gives wise counsel and guidance to you and helps check that leaders' expectations are as high as they can be. The setting up of an executive group of governors and headteachers across the MAT's local schools has enabled the strongest practice to be shared to benefit all pupils.
- The improvements in scrutiny and oversight have served to accelerate the progress you are making to improve the school and eradicate weaker progress. The improvements that you and the executive headteacher started to make in September 2016 have certainly accelerated this academic year.
- Middle leaders are growing in confidence and having a real impact on improving the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils. For example, the leader for English has reinvigorated the teaching of phonics.
- The leader responsible for mathematics has responded quickly to a dip in achievement in mathematics in key stage 2. She identified that there had been too much of a focus on pupils' fluency in calculation at the expense of their problem solving and reasoning. She has worked with you and colleagues in the MAT to adapt the curriculum, and introduced a new textbook that helps teachers to focus far more on problem-solving and reasoning skills.
- Early signs of improvement are promising, but there is a risk that leaders are focusing on getting pupils to the expected standard rather than extending the skills, knowledge and understanding of all pupils, including those that are most-able. Changes and improved teaching are likely to need time to embed before they will be fully reflected in key stage 2 published outcomes.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they track more closely the knowledge, understanding and skills that pupils need to develop in reading and mathematics so that teaching can fill any existing gaps and help pupils make faster progress
- the most able pupils are always challenged in reading and mathematics
- they communicate with parents regularly about the many positive things happening in the school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing body, the chief executive

officer of The Kemnal Academies Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for West Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lee Selby

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and the executive headteacher throughout the day to discuss many aspects of school leadership. Together, we visited a range of classes to observe pupils learning and to talk to them about their work. I heard a number of pupils read in class and also talked to some pupils from Years 2, 3 and 6 about their reading. I met with a group of senior and middle leaders, and separately with a group of key stage 2 teachers. I met the chair of the local governing body and one other governor, and separately with two representatives of The Kemnal Academies Trust. I considered 36 responses to Parent View and 15 responses to the confidential staff survey.