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Tracey Hickie
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Dear Mrs Hickie

Short inspection of Cove Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 7 June 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 September 2014.

This school continues to be good.

You provide ambitious and inspirational leadership, setting high expectations for your staff and pupils. Since your arrival in September 2016, you have led with determination to improve the quality of teaching in the school to raise standards. As a result, teaching at Cove Junior School is highly effective. Your staff value your leadership and the improvements you have made. Staff morale is high; they are proud to be members of the school. Your evaluation of the school's effectiveness is accurate, reflective and honest. The school's improvement plan is clear and precise. This shows that leaders and governors know the school very well. They are acting swiftly to make improvements that benefit pupils' outcomes, with vigour and purpose. Their capacity for driving further improvement is clear to see. All staff and governors work hard to achieve the school's motto, 'Aiming High'. Parents also value your leadership. As one parent wrote, 'Mrs Hickie is the heart of the school and an excellent role model for the children.'

Pupils report that they enjoy their learning. They spoke with enthusiasm about the half-termly topics that they study and said that teachers 'make them really fun'. They like many aspects of school life, including the school library and the wide range of after-school clubs. The sports leaders, wearing their bright green hoodies with pride, relish the leadership opportunities they have in organising sporting activities for younger pupils. Many parents stated how happy their children are at the school. As one parent commented, 'This is a safe and nurturing environment where children can flourish.'

The previous inspection highlighted many strengths, including excellent checks on pupils' progress, good behaviour and an enriched curriculum. You have maintained

these as strengths. At the time of the last inspection, leaders were asked to improve teaching by developing teachers' questioning and sharing the best practice in the school. Leaders, staff and governors have worked successfully to address these areas. Teachers' questioning is now strong and they effectively check pupils' understanding. In addition, there are many opportunities for senior and middle leaders to share best teaching practice. As a result, teaching extends pupils' thinking and they receive an educational diet rich in challenge.

In 2017, pupils' progress by the end of Year 6 in reading compared well to the national average. However, pupils' progress in writing was not as strong. Leaders and governors know that improving the writing skills of pupils currently in the school remains a suitable focus. Leaders have also identified that there is still work to be done to ensure that the outcomes for the pupils who started key stage 2 with average standards are as high as they should be. By the end of key stage 2, in 2017, the progress that these middle-attaining pupils had made was below that of their classmates. We also agreed that improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils should be a key priority for leaders in the immediate future.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leadership team have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Day-to-day routines are secure and any necessary actions are completed without delay. Pre-employment checks to ensure the suitability of all adults who work or volunteer in the school are fully in place. Safeguarding training is regular, including that specific to risks in your local area. Staff are vigilant and swiftly report any welfare concern they have, however small.

Pupils whom I spoke to say that they have many adults in the school they can talk to if they have a concern. One pupil commented, 'We can rely on our teachers, they really listen to you, not just pretend to listen to you.' Pupils also appreciate the 'worry monsters' who live in each classroom, where they can write down any problems they have, to share with staff. They think that the behaviour of pupils is 'mainly good' in the school. They say that pupils who need help with their behaviour choices are supported well. My classroom observations confirmed this. Older pupils have a strong understanding of how to keep themselves safe online.

Inspection findings

- My classroom visits, including the scrutiny of pupils' work, showed that most pupils make strong progress in mathematics. As a result of well-planned lessons, pupils have many opportunities to apply their mathematical skills and knowledge to a wide range of situations. The most able pupils routinely receive work that extends their thinking further. Middle leaders play a notable role in developing the teaching in the school. They keep a close eye on the progress of each pupil. As a result, any pupil who is slipping behind receives helpful intervention, tailored to their specific needs. Current assessment information shows that the middle-attaining pupils make less progress than the higher-attaining pupils. You have rightly identified that improving the progress made by middle-attaining pupils, particularly, but not solely, in mathematics, is an appropriate priority for the school.

- In order to improve the progress that pupils make in writing, leaders have introduced a wide range of effective strategies. Teachers carefully plan a writing stimulus that sparks pupils' imagination and deepens their experience. For example, on the day of my visit, Year 5 visited a local brook. This was linked to their study of the book 'The River Story'. On their return to the classroom, pupils confidently used powerful figurative language in a piece of writing about a river. During our visits to lessons, and while looking at pupils' work in their books, we saw many examples of pupils writing at length to a high standard. Pupils are very clear on how to improve their writing and they edit their work well. With sharp and specific support from the local authority, and strong and knowledgeable middle leadership, teachers ensure that the progress that pupils make in writing is rapidly improving. However, as leaders recognise, attainment and progress are still not high enough in writing.
- Leaders have established a clear strategy to ensure that disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities achieve well. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress in the school, academically, emotionally and socially. Through regular and effective training, the special educational needs coordinator helps staff to develop their knowledge of how best to support these pupils. Leaders make good use of external support for these pupils when required.
- Leaders recently requested a pupil premium review from the local authority to ensure that they make best use of the additional funding to help improve the progress for disadvantaged pupils. Assessment information shows that the current rate of progress for this group of pupils is improving, but is not yet consistent across subjects. A wide range of support is in place. However, the impact of each approach is not evaluated well enough. There are effective plans in place to ensure that this aspect of work becomes sharper and evaluative this year. We agreed that there are still further developments to be made to ensure that disadvantaged pupils' progress is consistently rapid in all subjects.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' attainment and progress in writing continue to improve
- a greater proportion of the middle-attaining pupils meet and exceed the expected standards for their age, particularly, but not solely, in mathematics
- they review the impact of the pupil premium strategy more effectively so that disadvantaged pupils make consistently good progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Lea Hannam
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher to discuss the school's effectiveness. You accompanied me on visits to lessons to observe pupils' learning, talk to pupils and look at their work. Together, we looked at the quality of pupils' work in books. I considered 59 responses from parents to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and their free-text comments. I spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day and read two emails from parents. I also held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority and met with middle leaders responsible for English and mathematics. Responses to the staff and pupils' questionnaires were also considered. I met with eight governors, including the chair of the governing body, and formally spoke to a group of pupils about their school. I observed behaviour at lunchtime in the playground. I also evaluated the school's safeguarding arrangements. A wide range of documents was examined, including: the school's self-evaluation; school improvement planning; information about pupils' progress; and various school policies.