

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



26 June 2018

Mrs Emma Clements
Headteacher
Stone Cross School
Adur Drive
Stone Cross
Pevensey
East Sussex
BN24 5EF

Dear Mrs Clements

Short inspection of Stone Cross School

Following my visit to the school on 5 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.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You are determined that all children will achieve well and attain emotional well-being. Your enthusiasm and decisiveness have delivered strong leadership, even though the school has gone through a period of significant change in senior leadership and long-term staff absences. You have won the confidence of parents and carers, governors and the local authority. Your deputy headteacher offers you strong strategic support and is having a positive impact on teaching and learning. You have a very clear understanding of the school's main strengths and those areas that could be better. For example, you know that most-able pupils could achieve more in writing and mathematics. You are outward looking and have established partnerships with local schools to share expertise. As a result, leaders and teaching staff are working as one on driving new initiatives to raise standards and share good practice. Subsequently, pupils are developing a deeper understanding and more secure skills in mathematics and writing, and standards were higher in 2017 than in 2016.

Parents are very supportive of Stone Cross, although some have been concerned about their children having too many different teachers during staff absences. They like the improved communication with the school and how happy their children are to attend. 'My children enjoy school and I strongly believe it is the teachers, the atmosphere and the ethos of the school which has led to this,' is one comment,

typical of many. You were rightly concerned about the dip in standards in phonics in 2017. You have ensured that progress in phonics has risen rapidly to previously high levels.

You are tackling the area that was identified in the last inspection as needing further improvement. The proportions of pupils in key stage 1 working at higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics exceeded national benchmarks last year. More key stage 2 pupils reached higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics in 2017 than previously, but you agree that more needs to be done to ensure that all pupils, particularly the most able, achieve as well as they can.

Governance is strong. Governors bring a range of skills to their role of holding the school to account. They know what the school does well and what needs to improve. Governors have sharpened the focus of their visits and this enables them to monitor leaders' actions well and hold them to account effectively.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

All checks and procedures for recruiting staff safely are carried out and records are meticulously maintained. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that they have had thorough training in keeping safe online.

Leaders provide appropriate training in identifying children who may be at risk, and there are well-established systems for raising concerns. These concerns are thoroughly followed up and well documented. Timely updates ensure that staff know of any changes or developments in child protection matters, for instance how to keep children safe from the risks of radicalisation.

The school works effectively with external services to promote the best care and support for children.

Inspection findings

- Staffing instability has led to some classes having too many different teachers. This has had a disjointed effect on pupils' learning. This period of turbulence has now ended, and the school is well placed to continue driving improvements and raising standards.
- Teachers show a strong commitment to improve their practice and contribute to ongoing school improvement. With the support of the deputy headteacher and an external consultant, the teaching of writing is improving. As a result, standards are rising, but are not high enough yet, particularly for the most able pupils. Where teaching is strongest, for example in Year 6, pupils have good opportunities to write at length in a range of genres and to study writing from high-quality texts. You agree, however, that expectations about the presentation

of written work and the quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar are inconsistent and need to be higher.

- Leaders have instigated measures to develop pupils' problem-solving skills in mathematics. As a result, pupils are demonstrating secure reasoning skills and can tackle higher level questions successfully. Pupils love earning their 'maths passports', which encourage fluency in basic skills and multiplication tables. Pupils' books typically demonstrate good progress, and current tracking indicates that a greater proportion are on track to reach beyond expected levels in mathematics than in 2017.
- Results in phonics dipped from historically high levels in 2017. You lost no time in addressing this. Because of additional training for staff and early intervention when children are at risk of falling behind, standards have risen. Year 1 pupils use their phonic knowledge well to read with confidence and fluency. Skilled teaching, including by teaching assistants, and lessons which closely match pupils' ability, ensure that all groups make good progress.
- Teaching assistants provide high-quality support. They are trained well and have strong subject knowledge, particularly in phonics. They build very nurturing and supportive relationships with vulnerable children and deliver bespoke lessons appropriate to their needs and levels of ability. Teaching assistants are careful to encourage independence in learning and have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and effort. Consequently, the pupils they support work hard and make good progress.
- The new inclusion leader has established programmes of support in reading, writing and mathematics for pupils who have particular additional needs and tracks the impact of this support closely. Case studies show that pupils make accelerated progress as a result and increasing numbers are reaching expected levels in these subjects.
- The combined attainment of disadvantaged pupils in reading, writing and mathematics matched age-related expectations for other pupils nationally in 2017. As with non-disadvantaged pupils, however, not enough most-able disadvantaged pupils are reaching the higher levels.
- Attendance overall is above national expectations, but attendance is lower for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Case study evidence shows that partnership working with outside agencies and support for families where children have medical conditions are strong. Current attendance for these pupils is higher than national attendance levels for these groups.
- The behaviour of pupils is a strength of the school. They are proud to belong to Stone Cross, enjoy their lessons and trust the adults in school to sort out any problems should they arise. Older children take on responsibilities around the school, such as those of peer mediators, and playtimes are harmonious, happy occasions. Pupils are keen to learn, and contribute enthusiastically in lessons. Pupils spoken to said they, 'love how relaxed and calm it is in class'. They feel very safe in school, make close friendships and welcome newcomers warmly. The wider curriculum has helped them understand British values well. As a result, pupils are tolerant and respectful of one another's differences and are supported

well to be ready for life in modern Britain.

- Staff confidence in the new leadership team is strong. Teachers show a strong commitment to improving their practice. However, the presentation of work in pupils' books is not good enough in some classes, and assessment information is not always used to set work at the right level for most-able pupils. You have already identified this, and have taken steps to ensure that all teachers have consistently high expectations and challenge all pupils to do as well as they can.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils make better progress in writing by the end of key stage 2
- teachers make good use of assessment information to accelerate the progress of the most able pupils so that more achieve at greater depth in writing and mathematics
- expectations for the presentation of pupils' work are consistently high, to ensure that pupils take pride in all aspects of their learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Lynda Welham
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held several meetings with you and your senior and middle leaders. I also met with representatives of the governing body, scrutinised minutes of their meetings and spoke on the telephone with the local authority representative. With you and your deputy headteacher, we observed the quality of learning in all year groups. I observed behaviour before school, in lessons and on the playground. As well as talking to a representative group of pupils from different classes about their experience of school, I spoke with parents before school and took into account the 83 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also considered the views of 18 questionnaires from staff.

I considered a range of evidence, including the school's latest assessment information, the school's priorities for improvement, leaders' self-evaluation, and

safeguarding procedures and policies.