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Samantha Norton
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Dear Mrs Norton

Short inspection of Thakeham Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 17 July 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 October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

You became headteacher of the school in September 2014 on a part-time basis, moving to full-time in April 2018. Since then, you have successfully led the school through another period of significant change and growth as the school became a primary school and relocated to a new site in September 2017. The school population has grown substantially and there are now four classes. Significantly, more pupils have joined the school at other than the expected time at the beginning of the school year. The challenges of growth and change have not taken your focus off maintaining the quality of teaching and learning in the school. As a result, standards are rising in the early years and key stage 1, and in key stage 2, standards in reading and writing are above national averages. You are aware, however, that higher proportions of more-able pupils, including children in Reception, need to achieve at even higher levels.

You have engaged staff, parents, carers, pupils and governors in developing a very clear vision and ethos for the school. You have built a strong staff team whose members are equally committed to and proud of the part they play in the school. Pupils were at a loss to think of ways in which the school could be better, and said that they enjoyed 'pretty much everything'. Parents love the 'welcoming, friendly feel and general air of happiness' in the school.

You have successfully tackled the areas that were identified in the last inspection as needing further improvement. For example, pupils are asked to use and apply their numeracy skills in mathematical investigations based on real-life situations. For instance, pupils in Year 6 worked with a local developer to design houses to scale and won a 'young architect award'. Children in Reception can now extend their physical learning and development using resources such as a trim trail and climbing frames. Pupils have widened their understanding of others' lifestyles that are different to their own. In lessons and in books, I saw many examples which showed that pupils now have sufficient time to complete their written or mathematical work. As a result, achievement in writing and mathematics is rising.

You and your senior teacher have worked closely with other members of staff to coach and mentor new teachers and to develop leadership skills across a range of subjects. You have developed close links with other schools locally to share expertise and training. Teachers are enthusiastic and highly committed, always seeking ways to improve and to bring out the best in every learner.

The numbers of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are a small, but represent a rising proportion of the pupils on roll. The achievement of all groups of pupils, including this group, is analysed closely. Individual programmes of support are helping these pupils to make good progress and catch up with their peers.

Governors bring a wide range of skills to their role. They are passionate about school improvement. They visit the school regularly to see for themselves how improvement plans are developing, and to check on pupils' well-being and safety.

Your current improvement plans are wide-ranging and ambitious for the school. They include, quite rightly, a focus on raising standards further, especially for more-able pupils. You recognise, however, that the plans require some refining.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Your child protection policy is clearly linked to current statutory guidance. The school puts great emphasis on emotional resilience and developing pupils' abilities to care for themselves and one another. Pupils say they feel safe and that there is always an adult they can talk to in school if they have concerns. All checks and procedures for recruiting staff safely are carried out, and staff training in keeping children safe from harm is updated regularly.

Systems of reporting concerns are well established, and work with external agencies to support vulnerable pupils is strong. The curriculum contributes to pupils' understanding of how to keep themselves safe, for instance when using the internet.

Inspection findings

- Pupils love coming to school. As a result, attendance is above average overall and persistent absence is low. Strategies to improve the attendance of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities have resulted in improvement, even though their attendance remains just below the national average. The behaviour policy is consistently applied and understood by pupils. A wide range of strategies, including the involvement of outside agencies and one-to-one support, has resulted in there being a decrease in fixed-term exclusions over time.
- The behaviour of pupils during the inspection, in lessons, before school, and at lunchtime, was good. Pupils who are disadvantaged, or who have SEN and/or disabilities, are well supported. The bespoke programmes delivered by skilled teaching assistants help to improve pupils' basic skills, independence and self-esteem. Rates of progress of current pupils in reading, writing and mathematics are good. Parents commented very positively about the good communication between home and school, as well as the joy of seeing their children become happy and successful learners.
- Achievement in key stage 2 is strongest in Years 5 and 6. Increasing numbers of pupils join the school during the term. This can impact on the proportions of pupils who are on track to reach age-related expectations in key stages 1 and 2. The vast majority of pupils who started the school in Reception make excellent progress and achieve in line with, or above, national expectations at the end of each year in key stage 2.
- This was the first year pupils took tests at the end of key stage 2. They exceeded interim national averages in reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation. Outcomes in mathematics were low. An analysis of pupils' test papers and checks on the quality of work in pupils' books show that those not meeting expectations did not perform as well as they typically did throughout key stage 2. The margins between meeting expectations and failing to meet them were extremely small.
- Pupils at the school know how to improve their work and how to develop resilience and perseverance when work is challenging. They have created 'super learning heroes' cartoon characters to remind them of the characteristics of successful learners, and they talk confidently about the learning behaviour they have demonstrated when sharing their work.
- Links with other schools and the community are strong. Expertise has been shared and developed as a result. Pupils contribute to the life of the community, for example by being 'reporters' for the parish news. Links with the adjoining grammar school are developing rapidly, particularly in sport.
- Pupils say they find lessons 'fun and interesting'. Purposeful links are made between subjects, such as Year 6 combining history, design technology, literacy and geography in their Second World War topic. A particular strength of the school is the care the older pupils take of the youngest children, for example as reading buddies or playleaders. They also take seriously other responsibilities, such as looking after the library or being computer monitors.
- You are developing a skilled team of subject and senior leaders. Leaders at all levels monitor their subjects carefully to check pupils' progress. There is a sense

of excitement about developing their own expertise, always striving to do things better. An example of this is the research project developing pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics, which has accelerated progress in problem solving.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the priorities set out in the school development plan are sharp enough so that staff and governors have clear and precise success criteria against which to measure progress
- teachers use assessment information to pitch lessons so that the most able pupils are challenged to reach the standards they are capable of, including in the early years.

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

Lynda Welham
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held several meetings with you and your senior teacher. I also met with each teacher to scrutinise pupils' books. I met with representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. You accompanied me on my visits to classrooms. I talked with pupils about their learning, and observed their behaviour before school and at lunchtime. I also met with the office staff who deal with personnel procedures, to scrutinise the school's safeguarding procedures. I met with representatives from the school council to talk about their learning. I considered a range of evidence, including the school's latest assessment information, attendance records, the school's self-evaluation, development plans, and safeguarding procedures and policies. I also looked at the online surveys completed by nine staff and 39 pupils, and viewed the 35 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I had conversations with parents and carers at the beginning of the day.