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Mrs Karen Boynton  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Boynton

### **Short inspection of Highcliffe St Mark Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 18 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 November 2013.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school has expanded significantly in this time and, as the school has grown, so has leadership capacity. You identified the need to 'let go of the reins' and move towards a model where leadership responsibility is more evenly distributed. The school's newly established leadership team is highly effective. Leaders share your vision for the school, as well as your drive and commitment. Senior leaders provide you with an appropriate balance of support and challenge. Middle leaders are still developing in their roles. They lead the development of their subjects effectively but do not yet possess the knowledge or skills required to evaluate the impact their actions are having on pupils' outcomes.

The school's expansion has required you to make a large number of new appointments to the teaching staff. Since the previous inspection, this has led to some variability in the quality of teaching, as well as pupils' outcomes. However, an effective programme of induction, appraisal and training has resulted in teaching now being consistently good across the school. Consequently, pupils currently in the school are making strong progress from their different starting points.

Together with other leaders and governors, you have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas requiring further work. Your self-evaluation is accurate and identifies the impact that leaders continue to have on school improvement. The school's development plan is comprehensive but lacks precision. The criteria for measuring the impact of individual actions are not sufficiently specific and not linked routinely to pupils'

outcomes. This is slowing the pace of school improvement and restricting the ability of governors to hold leaders stringently to account.

Pupils' behaviour is good. They conduct themselves well around the school and at less structured times, for example at lunchtime. The vast majority of parents talk positively about the school and their children's experiences. Most feel that the expansion of the school has been handled well and that leaders have ensured the community ethos has been maintained.

At the previous inspection you were asked to further raise the quality of teaching through the use of effective questioning. Leaders have raised teachers' expectations and teachers now provide pupils with greater levels of challenge. Across the school, there has also been a focus on teaching staff using higher-order questioning to explore and deepen pupils' understanding. This has proved successful in raising the proportion of the most able pupils now working at greater depth.

Additionally, you were asked to further raise pupils' achievement in mathematics. Turbulence in teaching staff has slowed the pace of improvement in this area. Outcomes remain broadly in line with national averages. However, leaders' actions to improve the teaching of mathematics have not yet had the desired impact on the progress pupils make from their starting points. This is especially the case for middle prior-attaining pupils capable of working at greater depth. Raising outcomes for these pupils remains a priority in your school development plan.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

A strong culture of safeguarding is evident throughout the school. This is underpinned by leaders and staff having an in-depth understanding of pupils' needs and vulnerabilities. The designated leader for safeguarding has ensured that all staff have received the appropriate level of training. Staff and governors spoken with during the inspection displayed a secure understanding of the school's policy and procedures. They were clear about the different signs of abuse they should be looking out for, as well as what they would do should they have any concerns.

Pupils feel safe. This is a view shared by nearly all parents who completed Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. Pupils say that bullying does sometimes happen. However, they are confident that any incidents would be dealt with effectively. The school has established strong partnerships with parents and a range of outside agencies.

The school's procedures for ensuring that it continues to meet statutory guidance lack rigour. As a result, there are gaps in leaders' understanding of the current requirements. At the time of my visit, the school's register of the checks made to ensure the suitability of staff to work with children did not meet statutory guidance. Additionally, not all of the statutory checks had been completed. Although you had rectified this by the end of the inspection, you recognise that systems to keep leaders and governors up to date with changes in the guidance need to be more robust.

## Inspection findings

- At the start of the day, we agreed the main areas of focus for the inspection. Firstly, as published assessment information was from the end of the previous academic year, we decided to look at the end-of-year outcomes for pupils currently in the school.
- Teachers' assessments and the work in pupils' books show that the majority of pupils in the school are making strong progress from their various starting points. The proportion of pupils assessed as meeting the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has increased from 2017. This is despite slightly weaker reading outcomes for this cohort at the end of early years.
- Teachers' assessments for the end of key stage 1 show that although outcomes are broadly in line with the 2017 national averages, they have declined since 2017. You have already examined the causes of this decline and provided evidence that this is the result of some weaker progress having been made by pupils historically. Your internal assessment information indicates that pupils are making much stronger progress this year. However, this progress is not yet enabling middle prior-attaining pupils to work at greater depth. This view is supported by the work in pupils' books.
- At key stage 2, reading continues to be a strength. In writing and mathematics, teachers' assessments and the work in pupils' books show that pupils make strong progress. This is especially the case for pupils working within the expectations for their age and the most able. As with key stage 1, middle prior-attaining pupils are not being routinely pushed on to reach the higher standards.
- Our second line of enquiry was to evaluate how effectively leaders are raising standards in writing across key stage 2, especially for boys. In 2016 and 2017, outcomes in writing were not as strong as those recorded in reading. This was, in part, due to the weaker progress made by boys when compared to girls.
- Middle leaders have identified boys' writing as a priority for the school. They built upon the strengths identified in the teaching of reading to develop more tangible links with pupils' writing. For example, teachers encourage pupils to include features used by published authors to improve their own writing. Teachers are also using class texts, such as 'Stig of the Dump' to provide pupils with engaging hooks which make them want to write. The school's focus on helping pupils develop stamina and resilience is having a positive impact on all pupils, but especially boys. This is now enabling pupils to better apply their skills and write at length across a range of curriculum subjects.
- Published assessment information for 2017 showed that at the end of key stage 2, pupils with lower prior attainment, including those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, made less progress than other pupils nationally with similar starting points. We, therefore, agreed to consider these pupils as our next line of enquiry.
- All teachers see themselves as 'teachers of SEN' and, as such, responsibility for the progress their pupils make. Individual support plans which are appropriate and well matched to pupils' needs have been drawn up. Effective routines have been established for monitoring the implementation of these plans, the progress pupils make towards their individual targets and how well pupils transfer their skills in their classwork.

- Teaching assistants use their in-depth knowledge of pupils' needs to provide them with well-planned, one-to-one and small group sessions. These build pupils' self-esteem and provide pupils with the skills they require to participate in class-based learning. The school's strong provision for pupils with education, health and care plans is enabling pupils with more complex needs to access the curriculum and demonstrate what they know, understand and can do. As a result of effective provision, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make strong progress towards their personal targets.
- Our final inspection trail was to consider how effectively children who enter the school with knowledge and skills in line with those typical for their age are challenged to exceed expectations by the end of the year. Published assessment information shows that the proportion of children exceeding the writing early learning goal at the end of the Reception Year has been below the national average for the past three years. I wanted to check whether this represented sufficient progress from children's starting points.
- In early years, leaders have reviewed the teaching of writing so that it more precisely meets pupils' individual needs. Teachers have also considered the ways in which they can remove the obstacles that pupils face in their writing. For example, leaders have put in place a progressive approach to develop pupils' fine motor control. Children are supported at a level appropriate to their stage of development. This ranges from supporting children with their pencil grip to developing pupils' ability to write for sustained periods of time. This precise focus is raising the quality of children's writing, especially for those working at or above the early learning goal. Children's writing is valued, celebrated and displayed throughout the early years. In classrooms and outdoor areas, children are surrounded by high-quality writing. In this writing-rich environment, children see themselves as writers and make the most of the opportunities that teachers provide for them to develop their skills.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- across the school, teaching enables greater proportions of middle prior-attaining pupils to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills above those expected for their age
- middle leaders have the knowledge and skills they require to monitor the impact their actions are having on pupils' outcomes
- school development planning is focused on pupils' outcomes and contains precise information about how success is to be measured
- those responsible for safeguarding maintain an up-to-date understanding of statutory guidance and that the school's safeguarding checks and records continue to be compliant with this guidance.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Dyer  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you and members of your leadership team. We discussed the school's self-evaluation, information about pupils' progress and improvements made since the previous inspection. Together, we observed pupils in classrooms and spoke with them about their learning. We analysed work in pupils' books from across the curriculum.

I had discussions with members of staff and three governors, including the chair of the governing body. I also had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. I looked at a range of written evidence, including documents relating to safeguarding. I spoke with parents at the end of the school day. I took account of the views expressed by 91 parents who completed the online survey, as well as their written comments. I also considered the views of staff and pupils who returned their questionnaires.