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Miss Lizzie Williams
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Dear Miss Williams

Short inspection of Palm Bay Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 December 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 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 you became headteacher in January 2015, you have developed an ethos that values pupils as individuals. The school's motto, 'Loving learning, making a difference, always aiming higher together,' captures your vision perfectly and is at the heart of everyone's work. As a result, Palm Bay Primary School is a happy and harmonious community in which pupils thrive.

There have been many changes in staffing since the last inspection, including at senior leadership level. You and the governing body recognise that, for a few years, this turbulence had a negative impact on pupils' progress, particularly on disadvantaged pupils. The current senior leaders are knowledgeable and lead their areas of responsibility well. Together, you have developed a strong and cohesive team of teaching and support staff. All staff share your drive and determination to secure strong learning and progress. You have motivated and inspired them to develop their skills to increase their effectiveness.

You and senior leaders have an accurate understanding of what the school does well and what could be even better. The regular checks you make on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress keep you updated. Your pragmatic self-evaluation informs your constant drive for improvement and determination that all pupils will achieve. The short-term plans are clear and purposeful. You have already begun work on a long-term strategic plan which will help ensure that the recent improvements are embedded and sustained over time.

Parents and carers are extremely positive about the school's work. They acknowledge the beneficial changes you have made to improve their children's education. Since your arrival, parents feel more involved in school life and their children's learning. The change to how the day starts, providing more opportunities for parents to talk to you and staff, is an example of this. Parents responding to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, wrote free-text comments which were overwhelmingly positive about the impact of the school's vision and values. One parent, summarising the views of others, said: 'We love the school atmosphere and their values really shine through in my children.'

Warm and effective relationships between staff and pupils help to ensure that pupils behave well and enjoy learning. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their learning, which they say is 'fun but challenging too'. They have positive attitudes and show a real desire to learn. Pupils concentrate well, work hard and listen attentively in lessons. They are proud of their school and learn to be caring, confident individuals who show respect for others.

You have dealt successfully with the recommendations from the previous inspection by providing staff with a wide range of training to improve teaching. Senior leaders understand the importance of ensuring that teaching is interesting, purposeful and challenging. They have made sure that teachers have secure knowledge so that they are well equipped to teach the full range of subjects. Better teaching is increasing pupils' ability to write in interesting and engaging ways, using imaginative vocabulary. Teachers' clear and timely guidance enables pupils to produce good work. The quality of pupils' writing in key stage 2 is much improved and, consequently, more pupils achieved the expected standard in 2018. In addition, you have taken effective action to raise Year 1 pupils' achievement in phonics. By ensuring that teaching meets pupils' needs precisely, most Year 1 pupils achieve the expected standard and quickly become fluent readers.

You recognise that mathematics remains a key priority for the school as, to date, outcomes at the end of key stage 2 have not improved quickly enough, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. New leaders in mathematics have not had sufficient time to have an impact, especially in key stage 2. You have identified the need to increase the proportion of pupils who achieve the higher standard in mathematics by the end of key stage 2. Another key priority is in response to the fact that, in the last two years, very few children have left Reception having exceeded the early learning goals across all the prime areas of learning.

Governors share your commitment and ambition. They receive detailed information about leaders' actions and gain first-hand insights into the school's effectiveness through their regular contact with staff, pupils and parents. They have received training to extend their understanding of the school's information about pupils' attainment and progress. Consequently, governors are clear about the school's strengths and areas for improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. They have recently commissioned an external review of this aspect of the school's work to ensure that practice is strong. Staff receive regular training and leaders make checks to ensure that everyone understands their safeguarding roles and responsibilities. As a result, staff are vigilant for any signs that a pupils' safety or welfare might be at risk. They use the school's agreed procedures to report any concerns about pupils' safety or welfare, and do so in a timely manner. Leaders respond quickly to these concerns and make referrals to external agencies when necessary.

The pupils I met with during the inspection were keen to tell me that they and their peers feel safe in school. They told me that if they are worried about anything they can speak to an adult. Pupils understand the different forms of bullying. They say that bullying is rare and that if it happens adults resolve it quickly and 'put everything right'. Staff teach pupils to stay safe in a variety of different ways. This enables pupils to understand and appreciate potential risks to their safety, including when working online. Pupils told me how important it is to use the internet safely and responsibly. They explained the importance of not sharing their personal information online and reporting anything that makes them feel uncomfortable to an adult.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was to look at teachers' expectations of all pupils in mathematics, exploring whether all groups reach the standards they are capable of, particularly disadvantaged pupils.
- You have secured improvement in the teaching, learning and assessment of mathematics across the school. A well-designed mathematics curriculum, which includes logically sequenced programmes of learning using a wide range of activities, is now in place. Pupils now rely on a range of resources to support their understanding of calculation methods. They told me that using objects has helped them learn in mathematics. Increasingly, key stage 1 pupils are encouraged to explain how they are learning. As one pupil wrote, 'I used number bonds to help me solve the problem.' Children in early years are not always as well directed and guided to make strong progress in number, and shape, space and measure.
- Although these changes are quite recent, they are already having a positive impact on standards. Consequently, the school's current assessment information and evidence in books show that most pupils are making good progress. Your careful tracking of each pupil's progress and the evidence seen in pupils' books demonstrate that current disadvantaged pupils are typically making good progress, often from low starting points.
- Leaders recognise there is further work to be done to ensure that all teachers' practice is modelled on the strong provision seen in most classes. In a small

number of classes, teachers are not consistently providing the more challenging activities to enable pupils' learning to move on quickly.

- My second line of enquiry looked at the quality of teaching across the wider curriculum and how it contributes towards all pupils being motivated, engaged and challenged to make strong progress.
- Leaders have developed the curriculum, increasing its breadth and depth of coverage as well as making appropriate links between subjects. As a result, pupils study a variety of interesting topics, enabling them to make good progress in the development of their knowledge and understanding, particularly in history and geography.
- Pupils throughout the school have the opportunity to draw on themed learning in history and geography to support the development of their writing. You have found that this has improved the overall standard of pupils' writing. Work in books shows that many pupils in all year groups are making substantial and sustained progress in a wide range of subjects.
- The new strategy for the teaching of writing, introduced by you, has enthused and motivated pupils. They talk enthusiastically about their learning, which they describe as 'fun but challenging'. Lessons effectively build pupils' knowledge of how to structure their writing and the impact of carefully chosen words. Concentrating on developing clear, legible handwriting has improved pupils' fluency when writing, as well as the presentation of their work. Pupils talk with great pride about their work and identify where they have made noticeable improvements. Boys are particularly motivated to write well through the study of high-quality texts that engage their interest. During my visit, we observed Year 6 pupils using vivid vocabulary to good effect as they created 'atmosphere' in their 'Titanic' reports. Looking at a range of writing in boys' books, it was apparent that they had made better progress over the past term. In the 2018 key stage 2 assessments, most Year 6 pupils reached the expected standard but few pupils achieved at greater depth.
- My third line of enquiry was to explore how leaders ensure that the training and development of teachers improves pupils' learning and progress.
- You have ensured that subject leadership has improved. Leaders are passionate about their subjects and focus on making sure pupils learn through interesting and stimulating topics and activities. An example of this is the subject leader's work to improve provision for art. The results are evident in pupils' excellent work, which is displayed with pride throughout the building. Staff plan regular trips and invite visitors to school to bring learning to life. A range of extra-curricular activities broaden pupils' experience and develop their self-confidence. Pupils also benefit from forest school, music tuition and different sporting activities.
- With support from you and your deputy headteacher, middle leaders have developed a good understanding of what works well and what needs to improve in their areas of responsibility. They work closely with the governors linked to their subjects. Middle leaders have grown in confidence and lead new approaches to improve teaching. English and mathematics leaders monitor and evaluate regularly and coach teachers to improve their work. Leaders of other subjects

have started to make checks on the quality of teaching and learning, but the development of this aspect of their role is at an early stage. They are working to more sharply evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' progress, and are beginning to identify where progress needs to be stronger to raise achievement further.

- Assessment is being strengthened. Leaders now monitor pupils' achievement closely and more frequently. They check on the progress of groups of pupils, such as disadvantaged pupils, boys and girls. Leaders use information to identify pupils at risk of falling behind and to plan tailored support.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the recently introduced mathematics curriculum is embedded to support pupils making stronger progress from the time they enter the school to when they leave at the end of key stage 2
- development plans include longer-term milestones to enable leaders and governors to evaluate the school's impact on improvement over time.

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

Yours sincerely

Jo Lakey
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and members of the senior leadership team. I also met with those responsible for safeguarding, inclusion and special educational needs and/or disabilities, and assessment. In addition, I held meetings with the chair of the governing body and four governors, a group of pupils, and with teachers, teaching assistants and three middle leaders. Alongside you, I visited lessons in each key stage and reviewed a sample of pupils' workbooks in lessons. I spoke to pupils about their work and to gather their views of the school. A range of documents was considered relating to safeguarding. I examined the school improvement plan, leaders' monitoring of the school's performance, and the assessment and tracking of current pupils' progress and attainment. I scrutinised pupils' achievement in the 2017 and 2018 statutory assessments. I also reviewed 70 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, including 57 free-text comments and 38 responses to the staff questionnaire. I also scrutinised the school's website.