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Mrs Lizzie Field
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Field

Short inspection of Park Mead Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 2 April 2019, 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 June 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

Your vision for the school as a highly inclusive place of learning is very clear. Staff talk fondly about being part of the 'Park Mead family'. They appreciate the wide-ranging professional development opportunities they receive and comment on how you have 'brought out the leader in everyone'. They recognise how important this is in a small school where there is so much to be done by so few. Staff feel empowered to make decisions for themselves and appreciate the steps you have taken to support their work-life balance. You, together with the governing body, ensure that everyone is treated fairly and equally.

Pupils enjoy their time at school. They told me they are 'lucky to come to school in such a lovely location' and that they enjoy the space they have to play in and the wildlife they see around them. Older pupils enjoy the stimulating curriculum, and especially lessons taken by specialist teachers, for example in science and French.

Pupils are proud of the additional responsibilities they take on as ambassadors, school council members or peer mediators 'who are there just in case anybody falls out'. Pupils told me that there is very little bullying in the school but that pupils do fall out sometimes, for example by calling each other unkind names. Pupils recognise that this is not 'okay' but say that it is soon put right by the pupils themselves or by a helpful adult.

While not all parents and carers are totally happy with every aspect of the school's work, the vast majority are, and would readily recommend the school to others. One parent rightly commented that 'This school looks so well after the whole child, not just the academic child.' Another parent wrote, 'The opportunities provided are amazing. Children are cared for and listened to.' That is certainly what I saw during my visit.

Children have historically made a good start to their education in the early years. This strong start has been maintained this year, even though there are more children with significant additional needs and there is also a new teaching team. Not a minute of learning time is lost in Reception. Children focus on their chosen activities and enjoy talking to each other about what they are doing and learning. Both inside the classroom and outside, adults are never far away, for example modelling correct spoken language or encouraging children to apply their early mathematics skills.

In previous years, pupils in Year 1 have not performed as well as others nationally in the phonics screening check. However, most pupils generally caught up in Year 2. You worked well with another school in your local cluster to improve the phonics provision and, in 2018, the results exceeded those found nationally. Children now get off to a great start in their phonics learning in Reception and this is built upon further in key stage 1. By the end of key stage 1, pupils achieve in line with national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics.

Progress in key stage 2 has been among the strongest in the country in reading, and slightly above average in writing. These are strengths in the curriculum. Conversely, progress in mathematics has been weaker for a number of years and was below average in 2018. The governing body fully understands how well pupils are doing. Governors use their significant skills and strategic approach to challenge leaders well to maintain and improve standards in all aspects of the school's work.

At the time of the previous inspection, you were asked to improve aspects of teaching to make them even stronger. There have been a number of staff changes since then and a change in focus to your approach to assessment. For example, you have moved away from marking to providing pupils with more immediate feedback, including from their peers. You have maintained the good quality of teaching in your school while making a significant contribution, with your team, to supporting other schools in your area.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all required checks are made on staff, governors and volunteers to enable them to work in the school. Staff and governors have received relevant and up-to-date training in many different aspects of safeguarding. This contributes to staff believing that pupils are kept safe. Pupils I spoke to, or who completed the online survey, confirmed that they feel safe at school.

Staff know how to share concerns when pupils are at risk of harm. Leaders work

well with other professionals to help keep the most vulnerable pupils safe and to support their families.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we explored the progress current pupils are making in mathematics, the leadership of the curriculum and pupils' attendance.
- Over time, progress and attainment in mathematics, especially in key stage 2, have been weaker than in English. The school introduced a new mathematics scheme that aimed to help all pupils master key aspects of mathematics by moving through a textbook at the same pace. However, not enough has been done to help pupils who find mathematics more difficult to keep up or catch up. As a result, too many pupils have gaps in their knowledge of basic calculations, number bonds and multiplication tables. Teachers are now beginning to use the textbooks and other resources, such as practical apparatus, more intelligently.
- The oldest pupils can articulate how they have made recent improvements in mathematics. For example, pupils explained how they applied their own knowledge in new situations, continuously practised or learned from teacher demonstrations, to help them understand and apply new concepts.
- Leaders have introduced a system of mathematical 'journalling' tasks, where pupils are required to demonstrate how they solved a problem in order to deepen their understanding of mathematics. While this approach is well suited to the most able mathematicians, some pupils do not yet have the mathematical skills, knowledge or vocabulary to complete these tasks.
- The school's ethos and values come alive in the curriculum. Governors and leaders are clear about the curriculum being highly inclusive and driven by their mission to promote pupils' physical and emotional well-being. They also want to ensure that pupils understand how they learn best and that they are confident and well prepared for their next stage of education.
- Pupils find the range of topics and themes covered interesting. They particularly enjoy theme weeks such as a recent science week and subjects, such as French, which are taught by specialists.
- Leaders are currently reviewing the curriculum to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of the current pupils and reflect the community the school serves. Leaders recognise that pupils do not currently develop a clear enough progression in knowledge in different subject areas. However, this is in the process of being addressed.
- Rates of attendance are below average, and the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is high. Staff know pupils and their families well, and are working with families to help improve attendance. The pupils who were persistently absent in the last academic year have all improved their attendance so far this year. However, for some, the improvement is minimal.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils have a secure grasp of basic number facts and multiplication tables before progressing to more challenging mathematics
- current work to develop the curriculum includes clear progression in knowledge and skills in all subject areas
- they continue to work with families to improve attendance.

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

Lee Selby
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you throughout the day and we visited each classroom together to observe learning and talk to pupils about their work. I held meetings with three members of the governing body (including the chair of governors), and held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I met with a group of teachers and we looked at examples of pupils' work. I also met briefly with the inclusion manager. I met with a group of pupils from Years 5 and 6 to discuss many aspects of school life.

I looked at a range of documentation, including that related to safeguarding. I considered nine responses to the staff survey, 22 responses to the pupil survey and 33 responses to Parent View, including 25 free-text responses. I also took account of a letter from a parent.