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Anna Crompton
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Dear Miss Crompton

Short inspection of Ringmer Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 13 June 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 November 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

The school has been through an unsettled period this academic year, with several changes, not only of teaching staff, but also of senior leadership. The previous headteacher left the school in December 2018. The deputy headteacher also left at Easter 2019. The inclusion manager has currently increased her time in school to provide additional leadership capacity until a deputy headteacher is appointed.

When you arrived in January of this year, you wasted no time in recognising the school's strengths and starting to tackle its weaknesses. Senior leaders are outward-looking and ambitious. You are constantly looking for ways to develop the school and sharpen its effectiveness, including working with other schools and using the expertise and advice of the local authority.

Your actions, and those of other leaders in the school, have brought about some improvements in teaching and learning. Outcomes at the end of key stage 1 and 2 improved last year. However, the progress of pupils in other year groups is variable. Typically, across the school, too few pupils exceed the expected standards for their age, especially in writing. Disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to their peers, both nationally and in school.

Leaders place the well-being of pupils at the heart of the school. Staff are trained thoroughly to care for pupils and to look out for their best interests. Pupils in turn trust staff, and this creates a happy, respectful learning community. The curriculum provides well for pupils to become responsible citizens, providing lessons in such topics as global citizenship and managing personal finances.

At the previous inspection, leaders were asked to make sure that the most able pupils always achieve well in mathematics by providing greater challenge when it is clear that they are ready for more difficult work. Work in pupils' books shows that they have regular opportunities to solve challenging problems and to explain their thinking. However, teachers do not systematically move the most able pupils on to more challenging work when it is apparent that they have understood the work.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. Those I spoke with during the inspection said that they appreciate teachers' friendly, firm approach and their willingness to take time to explain things to anyone who is unclear about their learning. Pupils behave well, both in lessons and at free times, such as on the playground. Their attitudes to learning are mostly positive; however, at times some pupils are rather passive and not fully engaged in lessons.

Parents are mostly happy with their children's education. The great majority of those who expressed an opinion would recommend the school, agreeing that pupils enjoy school and are well looked after. One spoke for many when saying; 'We are very pleased with the school and thankful to be able to give our children such a nurturing and secure environment to learn in.' Several commented on the positive impact of the recent changes that have been implemented, although a few felt unsettled by the turnover of staff and new approaches to teaching and learning.

Children get off to a strong start in the early years. They are inquisitive, and enjoy exploring and using the many resources on offer, both inside and outside the classroom. Staff understand the needs of young children and help them to achieve well. Outcomes in the early years have been above the national average in recent years. Elsewhere in the school, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard at the end of key stages 1 and 2 increased in almost all subjects in 2018 so that attainment was in line with the national average. Only in writing in key stage 2 did attainment dip from the previous year.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Pupils feel safe in this school. They are confident that the staff will listen to any worries that they might have and take appropriate action. Bullying is well understood by pupils, who say that it does not happen often and is dealt with quickly and effectively by staff when it does occur. Pupils also learn how to stay safe in a range of situations, including online.

Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the risks that pupils at this school face and are vigilant for signs that any may be at risk. You ensure that all staff have up-

to-date training in safeguarding and know how to recognise, report and record concerns, however small they may appear to be. Staff fully embrace their responsibility to keep pupils safe and carry out their work diligently. Those responsible for safeguarding follow up any concerns about pupils' well-being thoroughly, keeping comprehensive records of their actions and subsequent developments.

Inspection findings

- I looked closely at three aspects of the school's work during this inspection. First, I considered how well the teaching of reading in key stage 2 builds on the strong start that pupils receive in key stage 1. In recent years, progress across key stage 2 has declined from being above the national average to being broadly average. The proportion of pupils who achieved the higher standard at the end of Year 6 also dipped to below the national average in 2018.
- Pupils have a range of opportunities to read, including time to read independently. Teachers also read to pupils to help them gain an enjoyment of books and to open their eyes to a wider range of books and authors. Pupils enjoy books, read widely and can talk about their reading preferences.
- Since arriving at the school, you have made reading a priority for improvement. New approaches to the teaching of reading have been introduced to help pupils gain a richer vocabulary and develop higher-order skills such as inference and deduction. Teachers have secure subject knowledge because senior leaders have provided suitable training and professional development. Teachers ask good questions, guide interesting discussions, and ask for pupils to explain and develop their ideas in lessons. However, at times, teachers' expectations of what the most able can achieve are too low, accepting written answers that lack depth and clarity of thought.
- Second, I looked at how well the teaching of writing across the school enables pupils to achieve the higher standard. This was an area for improvement from the previous inspection and still remains a concern. Teachers do not have consistently high expectations for pupils' written work. They do not hold pupils closely to account for their presentation or the quality of their work. At times, work in books is careless and untidily presented. As a result, the proportion of pupils achieving the greater-depth standard in writing across the school remains below that seen nationally.
- Improvements in the teaching of reading have overflowed into pupils' writing. Pupils, including the most able pupils, make good use of vocabulary and use a range of descriptive devices. As in the teaching of reading, in lessons teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and mostly high expectations. They plan a range of opportunities for pupils to write for a range of audiences.
- Finally, I considered how well the governors support and challenge senior leaders, including the new headteacher. Governors have steered the school through this unsettled time. They have appointed an effective, substantive headteacher, and understand the need to secure a sustainable leadership structure to carry the school forward to embed and strengthen recent

improvements.

- Governors know the school well, its strengths and areas of improvement, as they use a range of evidence to form their view, including their own visits to the school. They are ambitious for the school and have high expectations. Leaders' and governors' ambition is reflected in the lengthy school development plan, which covers all aspects of the school's work. However, this plan lacks clarity about the most urgent areas for improvement. It also contains some inaccuracies and inconsistencies when setting measurable milestones to evaluate success. This restricts governors' ability to use it to hold leaders stringently to account.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching and learning enables pupils, especially the most able pupils, to achieve the high standards of which they are capable, especially in writing
- teachers have consistently high expectations for pupils' presentation and written work
- a sustainable leadership structure is established to strengthen further the school's capacity to improve
- the school's development plans are streamlined so that they focus clearly on the areas in need of most attention, and provide accurate, measurable success criteria by which senior leaders can be held closely to account.

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

Bruce Waelend
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the inclusion manager and other senior leaders to discuss various aspects of the school's work. I also met with three middle leaders to discuss the curriculum and spoke to several staff members around the school during the day. Five members of the governing body met with me to discuss their role in the school. I spoke to a representative of the local authority on the telephone. We visited classes in all year groups to observe teaching and learning, to talk to pupils and look at their work. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school, including at playtime. Several pupils spoke with me on the playground during morning breaktime, and I had a meeting with eight pupils from Years 4 and 6 to gather their views of the school and to talk about reading. I also spoke with parents on the playground at the end of the day. I took into account 131 responses to Parent View

including 83 free-text responses. One pupil completed the pupil questionnaire. I also considered 16 responses to the staff questionnaire.