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Mrs Rachel Nunns
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Nunns

Short inspection of Castlewood Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 September 2017, 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 March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Parents, pupils and staff all speak highly of the impact that you have made since arriving at Castlewood in January 2017. One parent said, 'Mrs Nunns has made a fantastic difference to the school – it was always a good school but we now consider it a brilliant school.' Together with governors and senior leaders, you have created a culture based on high expectations of achievement and behaviour. All at the school appreciate your friendly, positive approach because it leads to a happy, harmonious community.

You took up the headship of this school during a period of some turbulence and disruption in staffing. You focused rightly on improving behaviour, wasting no time in eradicating weak teaching and improving outcomes for pupils. Appointing experienced teachers to fill staff vacancies has had an entirely positive impact on the school. Even in the early weeks of the new school year, it is clear to see that teaching is securely good and that pupils are already making strong progress in their learning.

Pupils in the school have excellent attitudes to learning. They enjoy school and feel safe and valued. Parents echo this view. One said, 'The school has done a really good job in fostering a real love of learning.' Another commented, 'My daughter

absolutely loves her school; the smile on her face each day when she sees her teacher is absolutely heart-warming.'

The school environment is reflective of the high standards that leaders strive to achieve. Shared areas are bright, inviting places with high-quality children's work meticulously displayed. Classrooms are well organised, tidy and purposeful. Displays in them offer pupils helpful reminders about methods in mathematics, important spellings or aspects of grammar or punctuation. This helps pupils to become independent, resilient learners who are proud of their achievements. Pupils enjoy and benefit from a curriculum that includes a range of visits and visitors. You ensure that they learn about different countries and religions. However, pupils currently do not have enough understanding of the religious and cultural diversity of life in modern Britain.

During your last inspection, inspectors noted that leaders needed to raise the quality of teaching. In particular, they asked leaders to ensure that there were high expectations of pupils and a brisk pace of learning in lessons. You have made sure that the right actions are in place to further improve pupils' progress in writing, which has not been as good as it should have been in the past. As part of your drive to improve teaching, expectations are now high and pupils know that teachers expect them to work hard and do their best in all lessons. Inspectors also said that to improve teaching there should be clear explanations, guidance and feedback to help pupils improve their work. Staff now provide timely advice and feedback for pupils. Pupils regularly respond to this advice and make faster progress as a result.

Inspectors also asked leaders to sharpen improvement plans by focusing more clearly on pupils' achievements. Leaders and governors have addressed this well. They ensure that all plans are underpinned by challenging targets of how well pupils will achieve at every stage of their time at the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have rightly placed the well-being of pupils at the heart of the school's mission and culture. All staff have a clear understanding of how to safeguard pupils because they have received thorough training and regular updates when needed. At staff meetings, there is always an opportunity to alert adults to any concerns about pupils who may be vulnerable. Consequently, staff are well informed and vigilant to any signs that a pupil may be at risk, and are swift to raise concerns. There are well-understood systems to report and record such matters and all staff know that it is their responsibility to do so. Governors play a strong role in checking that leaders fulfil their responsibilities to keep pupils safe.

There are strong and effective systems in place to ensure that the right checks are carried out on people before they can work in the school. Relevant policies are detailed and comprehensive and are provided to all staff. Leaders make sure that all safeguarding records are kept securely and are treated confidentially. These include the files that senior leaders keep about vulnerable pupils and families where external agencies are involved.

Pupils feel safe in school. Older pupils take great care of the younger ones and provide strong role models for them. Staff at the school have the confidence of pupils. Pupils know that they will always be listened to if they have any worries about anything. Parents and pupils both agree that staff are approachable and quick to sort out any concerns that arise.

The curriculum and assemblies provide many opportunities for pupils to learn how to be safe. These include staying safe on the road, in water and in case of fire. Visitors help to make these lessons exciting and relevant. Even young pupils learn about the risks of being online and how to deal with them. Several spoke to me in some detail about how to avoid the potential pitfalls, including when using a games console. For instance, they understand the importance of protecting their online identity.

Inspection findings

- We discussed your self-evaluation and agreed the key lines of enquiry we would follow during this short inspection.
- My first line of enquiry examined the effectiveness of the governors in securing a sustainable plan for the school's further improvement and providing support and challenge for a new headteacher. Governors have an accurate view of the school and know it well. They understand its strengths and weaknesses because they use a range of evidence and information to reach their view. These include visits to the school to check that actions in the school improvement plans are being carried out. They also take careful note of the views of expert visitors to the school and information from published sources of information. Governors use this information to set challenging targets based on high levels of expectation and ensure that there are plans in place to achieve them.
- To be as effective as possible, governors have recruited people to the governing body with the right balance of skills, including those with expertise in education. This enables governors to provide a healthy balance of support and challenge to senior leaders, including to you as a new headteacher. Governors review their own performance regularly, using the help of advisers from the local authority. They act promptly on any advice offered. For example, they recruited new governors to fill areas where they felt that they were less strong.
- Second, we agreed to explore the effectiveness of leaders in enabling pupils to make good progress and achieve the highest standards in writing. You recognise that in recent years the progress that pupils make by the end of key stage 2 has not been good enough. Also, too few pupils have reached the higher standard in writing at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2. These measures all improved in 2017.
- One of the newly appointed assistant headteachers – a specialist leader of English – now leads the drive for improvement in writing. She has carefully analysed what needs to be done and is acting effectively to improve the teaching of writing. She rightly recognises that weaknesses in pupils' spelling have held them back. There is now a clear focus on teaching pupils to become more accurate, confident spellers and thereby, better writers. Where needed, staff have received training to increase their subject knowledge. We saw examples in a Year 6 lesson of pupils

successfully using new strategies to learn spellings and to recognise patterns and word families. This needs to continue and develop so that pupils' spelling ability enables them to make rapid progress and achieve higher levels of attainment in writing.

- Another strategy for improvement in writing rests on helping pupils to acquire a love of reading and books. Teachers now read to pupils regularly and ensure that a high-quality text accompanies every topic that pupils study. As a result, pupils read and listen to first-rate literature and this is beginning to improve pupils' ability to write clearly and expressively. Also, teachers aim to provide pupils with exciting opportunities for writing, including writing for a real purpose. Where this is happening, pupils' enthusiasm for writing is unmistakable. In the Year 1 class where a 'strange egg' had appeared and then hatched overnight, pupils were eagerly writing wonderfully detailed plans explaining their ideas for catching the mysterious creature. Where activities are less engaging, pupils' writing is less effective and much shorter. Pupils echo this view, saying that they write best and at length when there is something real or exciting to write about.
- My third line of enquiry asked how well teaching builds on the strong start that pupils receive in the early years, especially the most able pupils. You explained that significant staff turbulence had a negative impact on the progress that pupils made in key stage 1 last year. Fully supported by governors, you have taken the right actions to ensure that these pupils will be taught much more effectively this year. A part of this strategy is to place one of the assistant headteachers in the lower half of the school so that pupils' high levels of attainment are sustained. During our observations in lessons, we saw clear evidence of pupils of all ability levels making strong progress already this academic year.
- Finally, we agreed to investigate the effectiveness of leaders and governors in tackling instances of poor behaviour. Levels of good behaviour dipped last academic year, partly due to the turbulence in staffing. You quickly noticed this and made it an urgent priority to improve pupils' conduct. Involving all stakeholders, including pupils, you rewrote the behaviour policy, making sure that you took their views into account. Pupils said that the sanctions previously in place were ineffective and suggested better ones, which you sensibly included.
- All in the school agree that behaviour has improved significantly because of this new policy. Pupils were quick to say how much of a change there has been and point to the behaviour policy to explain why it is now much more effective. They say that the rewards and sanctions provide pupils with strong incentives to behave well. As a result, behaviour in lessons and around the school is of a very high standard. Older pupils look after younger ones and all speak highly of pupils' politeness, courtesy and kindness. One parent recognised this and said of her son in Year 1, 'We like the way that the older children all know and say hello to him.' Pupils' behaviour in the lunch hall and on the playground is well mannered and friendly. Where exclusion has been used, it has been used sparingly and strategically and has brought about improvements in behaviour.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers improve further pupils' spelling ability so that more pupils make rapid progress in writing
- writing activities consistently capture pupils' interest and offer them regular opportunities to write independently at length
- the curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to learn more about the religious and cultural diversity of life in modern Britain.

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

Bruce Waelend
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the two assistant headteachers, two middle leaders and four members of the governing body. I spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone. I visited all classes with you to observe teaching and learning, to talk to pupils and look at their work. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school, including at playtime and lunchtime. I spoke to several pupils on the playground. I also had a meeting with 12 pupils drawn from Years 1 to 6. I took into account eight responses to the staff survey, 35 responses to the pupil survey and 30 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as speaking to a number of parents at the beginning of the day. I evaluated a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation documents, school improvement plans, minutes of governing body meetings and safeguarding policies, procedures and checks.