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Mrs Tessa Sait
Headteacher
Mendlesham Primary School
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Dear Mrs Sait

Short inspection of Mendlesham Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 July 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in December 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

You have developed an effective staff team that works together extremely well. Staff share your ambition for pupils to succeed and enjoy their learning. Shortly after you were appointed, the school joined a multi-academy trust. You, staff, governors and parents appreciate the benefits of being part of a trust. Working closely with other schools in the trust has enabled you to share your expertise and to benefit from that of others.

Pupils are respectful and confident. They behave exceptionally well. When they work and play together, they demonstrate how their attitudes to learning play a key part in their academic success. They are polite and friendly to each other and to adults who, in turn, respect their pupils. Pupils are very proud of their 'amazingly fantastic' school. Their attitudes to learning and behaviour are strengths of the school.

Governors know the school well and appreciate the work of school leaders in bringing about improvements. They have actively sought training to improve their effectiveness, much of which is available through the trust. Consequently, they offer both challenge and support.

The vast majority of parents who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, were supportive of the school's work and recognised how well pupils are developing academically and personally. One commented, 'The staff are caring and clearly strive to support the children making good progress.'

Your evaluations of the school are informed by a secure range of evidence. You make effective use of guidance given by Hackney Learning Trust and John Milton Academy Trust. As a result, you have identified appropriate priorities for school improvement. These include the development of staff as curriculum leaders. As a result, all teachers have a clear understanding of how their areas of responsibility are improving.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, your governors and the trust have ensured that all safeguarding practices are fit for purpose. Documents and records of pupils causing concern are well maintained. You and your staff know your pupils and families very well, so you are able to make sure appropriate support is given when required. You champion pupils in your care and will challenge other agencies, when required, to get the help that is needed. Staff training is kept up to date at least annually. Staff know how to identify a possible concern and how to report it. Your procedures for checking the suitability of new members of staff to work with pupils are thorough.

Pupils say that they feel safe. They know they can go to someone at school if they are worried. They know about types of bullying but say that it rarely happens. They are confident that once a problem is reported to staff it is addressed and does not recur. Records confirm that pupils' opinions are accurate.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed that I would look at how well pupils are taught to use their phonics skills to help their reading and writing. This was because the information online looked as though there was not an agreed approach to teaching phonics. A smaller proportion of pupils in Year 1 met the required threshold of the national screening check in 2018 than in the previous year.
- Staff use one agreed approach to teach phonics and this is now evident on your school website. All staff pronounce the sounds correctly and model correct terminology. Almost all Year 1 pupils met the required standard in this year's phonics screening check. Children in the early years make an extremely strong start. Their independent use of digraphs seen during the inspection means they are already prepared to continue making strong progress in reading in Year 1.
- In Years 1 and 2, pupils developed their understanding of spelling contractions. This had been identified as a weakness in their own writing. Year 1 pupils who read to me did so fluently, demonstrating appropriate strategies to read unfamiliar words. They explained the content of what they had read and discussed their books with enthusiasm.

- For my second line of enquiry, I focused on how leaders ensure that pupils make consistently good progress in all subjects of the curriculum. There were inconsistencies in the information online about the curriculum and many subjects had little detail about how pupils' skills should develop as they advance through the school.
- You have ensured that there are systems and practices in place to record and track pupils' achievements in reading, writing, mathematics and science. These show that pupils are making good progress in each cohort. There is currently no formal system for assessing pupils' work in other subjects, although you recognise it is needed.
- You have produced a new marking and feedback policy, which has been approved by governors but has not yet been implemented. You wrote the policy because you identified that pupils need to be told how to improve their work in all subjects, not just in reading, writing, mathematics and art, as they are currently.
- In pupils' books, work is very well presented. This is because presentation and consistently formed handwriting have been priorities. However, pupils are rarely guided on how to improve their work in the wider curriculum. The exception is in art, especially in the coordinator's class, where skills are developed systematically to enable pupils to produce an end result of which they are proud.
- For my final line of enquiry, I looked at actions leaders have taken to increase the progress of current pupils in writing, especially those with average prior attainment. This group of pupils, in particular, has made less progress in writing compared to pupils nationally with the same starting point, over time.
- Writing has been a priority for school improvement. Systems are now used consistently across the school. Current pupils make strong progress in writing from all starting points as a result of your consistent practice. There are effective learning prompts in every classroom and accurate modelling of writing by teachers. Pupils are given opportunities to practise their ideas verbally before writing. You have prioritised the enrichment of pupils' vocabulary. Pupils use this vocabulary to express themselves maturely in writing and verbally.
- In key stage 1, pupils were given a writing task which required them to use the contractions they had learned to spell in the morning. In Year 5, pupils discussed the impact of plastic on the environment. They shared vocabulary that would enhance their writing and wrote maturely as a result. Children in the early years wrote about their class caterpillars becoming butterflies, using their phonics to produce work that they, and adults, could re-read.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' attainment and progress are assessed in all subjects, as they are in reading, writing, mathematics and science
- the school's newly adopted marking and feedback policy is implemented so that pupils know how to improve their work in all subjects, as they already do in

reading, writing, mathematics and art.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paula Masters
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

We discussed the lines of enquiry for this inspection, the school's internal evaluation of its performance, plans for future development and information about the progress and attainment of current pupils. Meetings were held with you, three curriculum leaders, the trust's chief executive officer and some of your governors, including the chair of governors. I spoke to your external adviser on the telephone. I looked at evidence to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. I visited all classrooms with you. I looked at samples of pupils' work. I spoke with seven pupils about their learning and well-being. I also spoke to pupils informally in lessons, around school and at playtime. Two pupils read to me.

I examined policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils, including mandatory checks made for the safer recruitment of staff. I looked at logs of behaviour and records of attendance. I held discussions with you about safeguarding. The views of 23 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View were considered.