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Ms Hayley Ferguson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Ferguson

Short inspection of Kings Copse Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 3 October 2018 with Mineza Maher, Ofsted Inspector, 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 February 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Over the last few years, the school has undergone a period of turbulence, including a two-term spell of interim headship. Since joining the school two years ago, you have determinedly focused on stemming the decline in standards. You rightly prioritised improvements in key stage 2, where results have been weakest. The changes implemented by you and your leaders are having a positive impact on many aspects of key stage 2. You are committed to making the school as good as it can be and recognise that in some areas there is more work needed.

Leaders' careful monitoring has identified that some aspects of teachers' practice in key stage 1 are not effective enough. In 2017 and 2018, pupils' key stage 1 scores were strong due to effective teaching, including the teaching of writing. These outcomes indicate that you have addressed the areas for development from your previous inspection report. However, in 2018, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics reading check in Year 1 was too low. You have sensibly prioritised phonics in your most recent improvement plan and you are determined that this aspect of your work will improve. However, planned new approaches are embryonic. You have more work to do in order to ensure that the teaching of phonics is consistently effective.

Improved teaching is leading to better outcomes in many areas. Early indications from the 2018 key stage 2 national tests show that progress in mathematics improved as a result of approaches introduced last academic year. More recently, you have focused on ensuring that pupils are sufficiently challenged in mathematics. The mathematics leader, who is also the deputy headteacher, has an accurate understanding of where this aspect of teachers' practice is well developed and where it is less effective. You are putting additional measures in place, including training, to ensure that new approaches have a consistently positive impact.

You and your governors do not believe in quick fixes. In the period since you became headteacher, you have focused on building sustainable improvements. Governors are keenly aware of how well new initiatives are progressing and make good use of evidence from a range of sources when holding school leaders to account. Of note is the way you have developed subject leadership and practice in assessment. Stronger subject leadership is also helping to develop practice in teaching across the school. Subject leaders have been candid about the need to develop their knowledge of key stage 1, as they have greater expertise in key stage 2. They are working alongside colleagues in your cluster of schools, and with local authority advisers, to do this. The approach to assessment that you have adopted has been carefully thought out and fine-tuned since the initial implementation. The approach focuses on measuring pupils' progression through the curriculum. It enables you to identify pupils who are falling behind as well as to evaluate how well the topics chosen for study deliver progression.

There is a local authority resource base for pupils who have visual impairment in the school. Pupils who have visual impairment are very well integrated into classes in the main school. The school makes good use of technology to assist children who have visual impairment in reading and writing. Children who have visual impairment told inspectors that they enjoy school and that they feel safe and looked after well. Bespoke support for pupils who have visual impairment is provided by a team of dedicated, specially trained assistants. There are approximately 13 learning support assistants in the school, in addition to the learning support assistants who are designated to work with pupils who have visual impairment. While some of these make a strong contribution to pupils' learning and managing behaviour, including in early years, others do not. You have already identified this as an area for improvement in your current development plan.

The school has an exceptionally positive ambience. A well-stocked library sits at the heart of the school in the main reception area. Pupils therefore pass through the library on a number of occasions throughout the school day and inspectors noted pupils browsing through books on several occasions. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about the opportunities that their school provides. Parents and carers appreciate the support that teachers give their children. One, echoing the views of many, commented on Parent View, 'This school really does nurture the whole child. Their achievements, no matter how small, are celebrated and the children feel incredibly valued as a result.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and the school's practice in this area is effective. New online approaches to record keeping are working well and the recording system allows all three designated safeguarding leaders to easily access information and efficiently add new information when necessary.

Safeguarding training is effective. An example of the emphasis placed on safeguarding is the additional bespoke training from the local authority on the new version of 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' which is planned for next month. This training is in addition to discussions on the changes in the guidance, as well as on other relevant topics, that take place regularly in staff meetings. The school has well-established links with a range of external services and liaises closely with three different virtual headteachers to support children who are looked after.

Inspection findings

- We agreed to focus on the development of early reading in Reception and Year 1 during this inspection. Although phonics scores have been high in the past, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in phonics dipped in 2018 compared with 2017 and was too low. Over the course of this academic year, a number of improvements in phonics are planned but are yet to be implemented. We agreed that some current practice needs further development. For example, the books that some pupils are given to read do not enable them to practise their phonic knowledge and skills. This is because they contain too many sound and letter equivalences with which pupils are not familiar. As a result, pupils guess the sounds linked to the letters with which they are unfamiliar. More often than not, their guesses are incorrect and introduce misconceptions.
- Inspectors also looked at learning in early years and how well children are developing their knowledge and skills in Reception. We found that assessment was detailed and thorough in Reception and the teacher had a deep understanding of children's needs. Some assistants in early years are skilled at enhancing and developing children's learning. For example, they set up play activities that enable children to gain new knowledge and skills. However, a number are not genuinely effective. As a general rule, the contributions to pupils' learning that are made by teaching assistants that work in the classroom setting are too variable. As a general rule, the contributions to pupils' learning that are made by teaching assistants that work in the main school, as opposed to the resource base, are too variable. In some cases, pupils rely too heavily on teaching assistants. Assistants are not always clear enough about what the pupils they support need to learn.
- In addition, inspectors also focused on the way governors oversee developments. The governing body has evolved over the last few years and has made a number of changes to the way it works. For example, the committee structure has been replaced by link governors who report back on specific aspects of the improvement plan during full governing body meetings. This has enabled governors to have sharper grasp of how well the school is doing.

- As part of this inspection, inspectors reviewed key stage 2, with a particular emphasis on mathematics. The new deputy headteacher has worked closely with local authority advisers to introduce additional challenges known as 'step 3' activities. For the most part, this approach is working well, and pupils told inspectors that they enjoyed mathematics. The quality of the tasks provided for the 'step 3' challenges varies. Sometimes, these provide the opportunity for pupils to develop their learning in mathematics further, including by applying their knowledge. However, on occasion, they are not challenging enough. Early unvalidated key stage 2 results for 2018 indicate that pupils' progress has improved due to new approaches such as this one. The deputy headteacher is providing additional training and support for teachers so that they make the challenge tasks demanding enough.
- The inspection focused on the impact that subject leaders are having. Subject leaders are making a positive difference to the school. For example, the leader for English has a sharp understanding of what needs to be done to improve pupils' spelling. She has already worked effectively with teachers, so that they broaden the range of writing tasks that pupils undertake and make greater links between reading and writing. Pupils now study books that are carefully selected because of the richness in their language, such as 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe'. Similarly, the new curriculum leader has introduced some effective new approaches in science.
- Pupils who have visual impairment do well because they are closely monitored. The school has a detailed understanding of the needs of each pupil who has visual impairment. Leaders are especially tuned into the levels and types of support required when pupils who have visual impairment have other, additional needs, such as speech and language needs. The learning and progress of all pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are effectively tracked. A bespoke approach is well integrated into the whole-school assessment programme and enables small steps in progress to be tracked.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's work on safeguarding. Supporting pupils who have difficulties in managing their emotions has been identified as an area of need and one that makes pupils more vulnerable to risks. A specially trained member of staff works closely with pupils for whom this is difficult. The member of staff involves parents in her work, when appropriate.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the books that pupils are given in order to practise their reading have sufficient opportunities for pupils to apply their phonic knowledge
- learning support assistants, working in the main school, make a more positive contribution to enhancing pupils' knowledge and understanding, especially in early years.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors checked safeguarding arrangements, including the records of recruitment checks, policies and procedures. We reviewed a range of information, which included the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, external audits and information about pupils' progress. Accompanied by you, inspectors observed pupils learning in mathematics, reading and writing across all year groups, including early years. A visit was made to the resource base for pupils who have visual impairment, and a meeting was held with the special educational needs coordinator. Inspectors also met with a group of subject leaders. A separate meeting was held with designated safeguarding leaders, which included the headteacher. A meeting was held with the representative from the local authority, who has been supporting the school, and separately with the chair of the governing body, accompanied by three other governors. Inspectors undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work and also met with a small group of pupils. They reviewed 36 responses to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, Parent View, including 20 free-text comments. Inspectors also considered 26 responses to the staff survey and one email from a parent.