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Dear Mrs Clarke

Short inspection of Midhurst CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 May 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 July 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 happy and welcoming school is firmly established in the heart of the community. Governors and staff are rightly proud of the school's open and inclusive culture. Nearly all parents and carers who spoke to me and who contributed their views to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, hold the school in high regard. Many commented on how happy their children are, the care they receive and how much they enjoy learning. Pupils told me how they work together as a team, enjoy all the different activities on offer and feel secure and safe.

Since the last inspection, you and your senior team have honestly evaluated the school's strengths and weaknesses. You have raised expectations of what pupils are able to achieve by firmly and sensitively insisting upon high standards of teaching and accurate assessment. You have also made sure that all staff learn and develop from good-quality training and opportunities to share good practice.

You and your senior team have drawn up appropriately ambitious plans to improve the school. You are closely focusing on increasing rates of progress, including for the most able pupils. You have wisely made the decision to start at the very beginning and make key improvements to provision in the early years. As a result, increasing numbers of pupils are now making good progress in all areas. More pupils than in the past are reaching higher standards overall. However, you correctly acknowledge that pupils in key stage 1 are not progressing as well as they

could, particularly in writing.

Governors and the local authority challenge and support the school to do better. In typical fashion, you and your team look outwards and value the advice you have been given by the local authority school improvement partner. Governors have an accurate view of the school's performance and make it their business to question and challenge leaders for answers. Governors demonstrate a strong understanding of how accountable they are and take their duties seriously. However, during this inspection, I identified that governors had not ensured that leaders provided a thorough enough analysis of the impact of pupil premium funding.

A very small number of parents expressed some concerns about some pupils' behaviour towards others during lunch and breaktimes. However, these views were untypical. I found much evidence of pupils' respect and kindness to each other, right from the early years onwards. I also noted how much support the school gives to families, treating parents and pupils with respect and consideration.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have made sure that arrangements for safeguarding are effective and meet all statutory requirements. You have made sure that leadership in this area has been strengthened. The team of designated safeguarding leaders (DSLs) work together as a team to support each other. In this way, you ensure that concerns are shared and acted upon quickly.

The DSLs and staff have been trained effectively to note and report the signs of harm, including neglect. When child protection referrals are made, the DSLs are tenacious in pursuing other agencies for responses and support. Staff are confident about what to do if they are worried about a pupil's welfare. They know that they must not ignore minor worries, because these may point to more serious risks of harm. Staff are equally confident that when they raise concerns, these will be acted upon. All required checks on adults working in the school have been made and are regularly overseen by governors.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we agreed to focus on the following areas: how leaders are raising teachers' expectations so that more pupils achieve higher standards; improvements to pupils' writing in all key stages, including the early years; and the impact the school is making on pupils' attendance. As part of our focus on raising expectations, we also took account of improvements you are making to the teaching of mathematics.
- School leaders and governors are resolutely committed to raising standards. You are all determined to increase rates of progress and ensure that more pupils than in the past achieve greater depth in all their learning. You and your team of staff know pupils very well and respond effectively to their different needs and difficulties. For example, you have identified that some pupils are not adept with their number work, which holds them back when solving mathematical problems.

Teachers have consequently adjusted their planning to ensure that pupils have opportunities to practise and become more fluent.

- Teachers' high expectations are clearly evident throughout the school. Pupils have established good learning habits. They enjoy working in a well-maintained and stimulating environment. Attractive and interesting materials and topics inspire pupils and motivate them to work harder. Well-trained and knowledgeable teaching assistants lead your phonics sessions and programmes of extra help skilfully.
- Pupils willingly make use of all the strategies you have introduced without needing to be reminded. Without prompting, they told me how they try to work things out for themselves first before asking for help. They proudly showed me how they refer to their targets and teachers' advice to help them with the next piece of work. Notwithstanding, you are conscientious about teachers' workload and you ensure that teachers' preparation and assessment are no more onerous than they need to be.
- You and your leadership team have analysed shortfalls in pupils' progress, particularly in writing. You have correctly identified that weaknesses need to be tackled early on in children's education. As a result, you and the early years team have transformed your approach in the Reception class. The early years team members are focused on developing pupils' speech, storytelling and use of phonics knowledge in their writing. Through this change in approach, children can construct accurate sentences and whole stories with increasing self-assurance and fluency. They joyfully enact their stories, listen with concentration and pose logical questions to each other. Their written stories demonstrate strong progress in vocabulary, spelling and punctuation. By the end of their time in Reception, children write with confidence, ease and minimal support from adults.
- However, rates of progress in writing are slower in key stage 1. Some pupils in Years 1 and 2 have gaps in their learning. You have ensured that programmes of extra help are in place to support pupils' special educational needs where necessary. Skilled and experienced teaching assistants have been deployed to support groups of pupils to help them catch up. Recent work in pupils' books, particularly in Year 1, is now showing improvement. Pupils' curiosity has been inspired by the introduction of interesting and horizon-broadening topics. For example, pupils in Year 1 were excited to tell me about how much they had learned during a recent 'trip to Spain on a plane' organised as a special day in the school calendar. Nevertheless, you have rightly identified key stage 1 as a priority for improvement in your plans for the school.
- In older pupils' work in key stage 2, there is much lively and engaged writing. Most pupils really enjoy writing and take delight in their work. They know how to plan effectively and tailor their writing to a particular audience and purpose. Most pupils learn to spell and punctuate accurately, although there are some pupils who need to improve their accuracy.
- Recent improvements to the curriculum have provided pupils with more interesting content to include in their writing. Challenging reading books provide pupils with a rich set of experiences to draw upon in their writing. Pupils who

spoke to me were evidently motivated by their reading and talked about books being 'engaging' and 'mysterious'. They enjoy writing about the books they study in class. Most-able pupils talk with insight about the 'writer's voice' and their choices of tone, style and vocabulary.

- Pupils' attendance is slightly below national figures for similar schools. With patient and determined work with families, you and the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) have made an impact on the improved attendance of individual pupils. Nevertheless, some patterns of unauthorised absence are proving hard to change.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- consistently effective teaching enables pupils in key stage 1 to make good progress, particularly in writing
- pupil premium spending is precisely evaluated by its impact on personal and academic outcomes for pupils
- rates of persistent and casual absence reduce.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Chichester, 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

Janet Pearce
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, members of your senior team and a group of governors. I also invited all teaching and non-teaching staff to attend an open meeting after school. I spoke to pupils informally in lessons and chose a representative group of pupils from Years 4 and 6 to meet with me for a more formal meeting with their books. Together with senior leaders and the subject leader for mathematics, we carried out a scrutiny of pupils' books. Accompanied by you and senior leaders, I visited lessons in all key stages to observe pupils learning and look at their work. I spoke to the school improvement adviser from West Sussex local authority on the telephone.

I reviewed 42 responses and free-text comments from parents to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. I also spoke to several parents dropping off their children in the morning. The 32 responses to the staff survey and 145 responses from pupils to the pupil survey were considered alongside other evidence.

I reviewed a range of documentation, including information about pupils' attendance, records of child protection, minutes of governors' meetings, reports from the school improvement partner and the school's self-evaluation and development planning.

During the inspection, Year 5 pupils were out of school on a pre-arranged visit. Books from pupils in Year 5 were included in the work sample.