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Mrs Georgina Young
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Young

Short inspection of Houghton Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 30 November 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 February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

Parents are very supportive of the school and nearly all would recommend the school to others. In my discussion with a small group of parents, and in Parent View, parents described the school as very warm and welcoming. One parent typically wrote, 'I am extremely pleased with the school. My child is now thriving and has gone from strength to strength. I am very pleased with my child's progress.' You and your leaders greatly value the contribution of parents as partners in learning. Parents greatly appreciate the workshops, 'Come and try it' events and talks, which your staff provide for them.

You, school leaders and governors have an accurate view of the school. This is firmly based on rigorous monitoring of the impact of the school's work, especially teaching, on pupils' learning and personal development. You use the outcomes of this effectively to establish clear priorities for improvement and to ensure that the school continually improves. You and your senior leaders have successfully addressed both areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. These related to the school's system of marking and assessment. The school has developed a detailed and imaginative assessment system to track progress of pupils based on a complete review of the assessment policy and practice.

You have improved the curriculum with a wider range of sporting clubs and opportunities for enrichment, such as after-school activities in art, film-making, music and singing. You

are making very good use of primary sports funding to train staff to promote pupils' health, fitness and well-being. This has led to high levels of pupils' participation in sports clubs and pupils exercising vigorously. As a result, the school has achieved the Gold Award in the School Sport Award programme and was a finalist in the Primary School of the Year category of the county's Living Sports Awards. Leaders have also developed the sports leadership course for pupils in Year 6. The Year 6 sports leaders are helping younger pupils, by encouraging them to exercise at breaktimes. Leaders are also using the additional pupil premium funding well to support good outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

You are promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, including an understanding of fundamental British values, effectively through assemblies, topics on world religions and visits to different places of worship. You also promote this well through the celebration of world festivals, through the introduction of German in the school, the provision of French and Spanish clubs and through topic work, such as the topic of Egypt. Pupils' behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. They take on responsibility willingly as helpers and sports leaders. Pupils greatly enjoy school, which is reflected in their good punctuality and attendance, their positive attitudes to learning and the pride they take in presenting their work neatly.

Staff morale is high. This is reflected in the overwhelmingly positive views expressed in their questionnaires. Leaders at all levels are now striving for excellence in teaching and pupil outcomes. There are clear plans in place to strengthen the teaching of phonics at key stage 1 and ensure consistency in the use of assessment across the foundation subjects. The school works well with other local primary schools and with the community, for the benefit of pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team and governors have ensured that all safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose and records are suitably detailed and of high quality.

The school works closely with parents to promote its strong culture of safeguarding, for example in giving clear guidance on the safe use of computers. One parent wrote typically, 'Houghton is fantastic at safeguarding and looking after the children in the school.' Teachers follow up any concerns about pupils with parents and value their input. Procedures for checking the suitability of staff and visitors to work with pupils are rigorous. Leaders ensure that all safeguarding policies are in place and fully up to date. The school closely monitors attendance of vulnerable groups under the effective leadership of the deputy headteacher and special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). They have clear safeguarding protocols, which are implemented well to check that no pupils are missing from school. The school site is safe and secure. The curriculum promotes personal safety well and all children are taught e-safety. A clear physical intervention and recording system is in place, and a named teacher promotes the achievement of the small number of pupils who are in the care of the local authority. Governors discuss safety and well-being at all committee meetings of the governing body. Pupils, parents and staff all agree that pupils are safe.

Inspection findings

- I discussed with you what the school has done to raise attainment in reading and why the lower-attaining pupils did not do as well as their classmates. You have implemented a plan to raise achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders have established a strong culture for reading and revitalised the programme to accelerate reading. The English leader has shown parents how reading is taught in the school and how to support their children's reading at home. This work has led to a significant rise in standards in reading in 2017 from 2016. The school's accurate records show that lower-ability pupils, including those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are making good progress in reading from their lower starting points.
- Teachers are now more confident and secure in assessing reading accurately. They are identifying gaps in learning and providing good support to narrow these gaps. Pupils of different abilities read their books and samples of their own writing to me with confidence during the inspection. Their reading records show that they are reading widely and often at home and in school. They told me how much they enjoy reading.
- I also wanted to find out how well the lower-ability pupils and those of average ability are doing in writing and mathematics. The school's plan for raising achievement in writing, through its 'Big Write' strategy, is enabling all pupils to excel in writing with well-chosen topics to captivate boys' interests. The English leader has provided staff with clear guidance on the teaching of spelling, punctuation and grammar to support writing. As a result, boys are now doing as well as girls.
- The mathematics leader has modified the curriculum so it is more effective. Teachers now provide opportunities to deepen pupils' mathematical reasoning skills with more opportunities for problem solving. Staff are encouraging pupils to use a mathematics computer programme to support their learning and enjoyment of mathematics at home. Pupils' work and visits to lessons show that they are deepening reasoning skills in explaining how they have arrived at their answers. The school's data shows that these strategies are working because pupils with low and middle prior attainment are making at least the progress expected towards their targets in writing and mathematics.
- Another focus was how secure the teaching of phonics is and what impact this is having on pupils' progress in phonics. In 2016, there was a sharp fall in the proportion of pupils in Year 1 reaching the required standard in the phonics check. Although the proportion of Year 1 pupils reaching the required standard rose slightly in 2017, it was still below the national average. You explained that the sharp dip was due to turbulence in teaching in Year 1. However, a new teacher has recently been appointed and is beginning to make a difference. The Year 1 and Year 2 pupils who read to me during the inspection used phonics well to sound out unfamiliar words in their reading books and when reading their own writing. Their reading records also show that they are reading on a daily basis at home and in school. This clearly confirms improvements in the teaching of phonics.
- Leaders expect a further rise in the proportion of pupils reaching the required standard in phonics this year. They also recognise that more needs to be done to strengthen phonics teaching, and they have a clear plan in place to bring this about. This includes enabling staff to observe best practice in the teaching of phonics in local schools, with more training, support and monitoring. This plan has yet to be implemented.

- I wanted to find out whether all groups of pupils are making enough progress in English at key stage 1 and in writing at key stage 2. The school's accurate system for tracking pupils' progress and pupils' work shows that all pupils are making good progress in writing at key stage 2. During my visits to lessons, the lower-ability pupils read their own writing to me about their topic on sedimentary and cretaceous rocks and enthusiastically explained the differences between the two types of rocks. The work of disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 shows that they are making good progress in writing. They read their own diary letter back to me confidently, which was written neatly with good use of vocabulary, punctuation and spelling, using a cursive script.
- Although girls at key stage 1 are making better progress from their starting points in English now, the turbulence in teaching at key stage 1 has limited the progress over time. Nevertheless, pupils are beginning to catch up in reading and writing.
- Finally, I wanted to determine how secure teachers are in using assessment to record attainment and track the progress of pupils, and what leaders are doing to ensure that these assessments are accurate. Pupils' work and the school's data show that teachers are making good use of the new assessment system for tracking and recording attainment and progress in the core subjects. Teachers are using assessment outcomes well to plan lessons and provide challenging learning tasks for pupils. In discussion, pupils said that they enjoy challenges in learning and they have a good idea of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. However, this assessment system has not yet been implemented across the foundation subjects.
- Leaders are checking that teachers' assessments are accurate every term. They are also carrying out external checking by local schools to ensure that these are reliable. The recent review by the local authority noted the good improvement in assessment, with full data in place to accurately show the progress pupils are making. The early years staff have improved the use of the learning journey to track and record the progress children are making towards achieving a good level of development across all areas of learning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they fully implement their plans to strengthen the teaching of phonics at key stage 1
- teachers consistently use the school's assessment system across the foundation subjects for informing pupils how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

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

Yours sincerely

Declan McCarthy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the deputy headteacher, subject leaders and governors to discuss the progress since the previous inspection. I carried out lesson visits to all classes with senior leaders to look at the impact of teaching and assessment on pupils' learning and progress. During these visits, I looked at pupils work and discussed their learning with them. I also talked to the SENCo about the progress pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are making. I heard pupils in Years 1, 2 and 6 read and I looked at their reading records. I talked to a group of pupils to seek their views. I examined the 68 responses to Parent View, including the 46 free text responses, and I met with a small group of parents to seek their views. I considered the 27 staff responses to their questionnaires. I looked at a range of documentation including: your school self-evaluation document and school development plan; minutes of governing body meetings; safeguarding policies and procedures; the procedures for checking the suitability of staff to work with pupils and records of staff training; and records of incidents of behaviour and attendance figures.