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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Stewart James
Executive Headteacher
Hamsey Community Primary School
Cooksbridge
Lewes
East Sussex
BN8 4SJ

Dear Mr James

Short inspection of Hamsey Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 31 October 2018, 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

The school has had significant leadership and staff changes since 2015. We agreed at the start of this inspection that I would consider the effect of these changes as one of my key lines of enquiry. Since you joined the school as executive headteacher in September 2016, you have brought renewed clarity of vision for its future, raised staff morale and steered the school through a challenging time. You are executive headteacher of the group of three schools to which Hamsey now belongs and currently lead the school for two days of the week. You are ably assisted by an advisory headteacher and the special educational needs coordinator who complete the senior leadership team for the remainder of the week while your head of school is seconded to another school. You are ensuring that plans are in place to build further capacity within the school by developing middle leaders from within the existing staff. This was a target set at the last inspection. This is at an early stage of development because staffing has not been stable and the impact of their work is yet to be seen. Collaboration with the two other schools in the federation has strengthened the professional development of subject leaders and middle leaders, as well as developing joint planning and training for staff. Your governors are knowledgeable, fully involved in the school's work and offer you strong, strategic support and challenge.

Reading is a strength of the school as a result of initiatives in reading and speaking and listening which you introduced. You rightly identify raising standards in writing

to the same high standards as reading and mathematics as a target for school improvement and this was agreed as another focus of the inspection. As well as checking on safeguarding, we also examined how well disadvantaged pupils were doing in school and if the gap between their achievement and that of their non-disadvantaged peers was closing.

Parents spoke highly of the 'warm and nurturing environment where children love learning.' They say there is a real sense of family and that teachers are very responsive to parents' concerns, which are acted on promptly. Increasingly, several children join the school at times other than at the start of the year. A strength of the school is how quickly they settle and blossom because staff nurture the individuality of each child and make sure that lessons are, as pupils told me, 'fun and exciting'.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You have ensured that staff and governors, including those new to the school, understand safeguarding policies and procedures. Checks on the suitability of staff are recorded appropriately.

The school is at the heart of the community and you know your families well. Pupils feel safe and take responsibilities within the school seriously. They look out for one another and say that there is always a trusted adult to whom they can turn if they have concerns.

Leaders work closely with outside agencies when pupils are thought to be at risk. Systems for raising concerns are clear and understood by all staff.

Attendance rates, although improving, are still too low, despite the school's best efforts. You do, however, investigate all absences to make sure that they are not related to safeguarding matters.

Inspection findings

- You have successfully re-built the school team following a challenging period of staffing changes. Your determination that the school will be excellent is shared by all, including pupils, who talked eagerly about learning to 'aim high'. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved because teachers share expertise, such as joint planning, training and checking the accuracy of their assessments, within the federation.
- One of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection was to ensure that subject leaders regularly monitor the quality of teaching and pupils' progress in curriculum areas other than English and mathematics. This is at an early stage of development because of so many staff changes. You have appointed middle leaders who have begun to monitor the quality of planning and teaching in English and mathematics. They have made a good start and are well supported

by senior leaders in the school, but the full influence of their work is yet to be seen.

- Outcomes have improved as a result of initiatives in reading and speaking and listening. Reading and mathematics are above national averages at the end of key stages 1 and 2, both at expected levels and at greater depth. There is more to do to improve writing to the same high standard as other subjects. This is especially so in key stage 1, where too few pupils reach greater depth in writing. The proportion of pupils reaching greater depth at the end of key stage 2 has improved to be in line with national averages.
- The curriculum has been adapted successfully to engage reluctant writers. High-quality texts drive topics such as 'polar exploration' and 'flight' and there are many opportunities for pupils to write from first-hand experiences such as visiting the science museum, outdoor learning activities and art days. Pupils take responsibility for editing their own work and that of their peers and know precisely what they have to do to improve. You rightly acknowledge that the presentation of writing in books is the next improvement area on which the school needs to focus.
- Leaders have analysed the barriers to learning that disadvantaged pupils have, so that bespoke programmes can be put in place. There is a good balance between curriculum support and pastoral support. Small-group coaching by the excellent sports coach builds pupils' confidence, and more disadvantaged pupils now play a full part in games and clubs. Current disadvantaged pupils make the same or better progress than their non-disadvantaged peers in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 2.
- You have launched a range of initiatives to encourage regular attendance and hold parents and carers to account for pupils' persistent absence. You know your families very well and provide support to them 'above and beyond' during difficult times. Rates of attendance are improving but remain below national averages.
- Governance is strong. The governing body knows what the school does well and what it could do better. This is because governors visit regularly and check how well the school is meeting the targets set in its development plan. They ask searching questions and are effective in holding leaders to account.
- The local authority recognises the strong leadership in the school and the challenges it has faced since the last inspection. Such is its confidence in the school's governors and teachers that it has provided 'light-touch' support. The local authority carried out checks on the accuracy of assessment procedures within the school last year and found it to be secure in key stages 1 and 2.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- new subject leaders and middle leaders have the skills and understanding to drive improvements in their subjects

- outcomes in writing are as good as in other skills and pupils take greater pride in the presentation of their work
- actions taken to improve attendance are effective and lead to attendance figures that are at least in line with the national average.

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

Yours sincerely

Lynda Welham
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I visited every class with you and your advisory headteacher. I spoke to pupils and looked at work in books. Meetings were held with senior leaders, groups of pupils and three governors, including the co-chair of the governing body. I also spoke with the school's improvement partner, appointed by the local authority.

I spoke to parents at the start of the day and took into account 21 responses, including written comments, to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also analysed nine responses to the staff questionnaire.

A range of documents was reviewed, including the school's development plan and self-evaluation document, information about pupils' achievement, attendance, behaviour and safety, governing body reports, and reports from the school's improvement partner.