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29 June 2016

Lindsey Hudson
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Dear Mrs Hudson

Short inspection of Alfriston School

Following my visit to the school on 16 June 2016, 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 March 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since joining the school in September 2014, you have refreshed its vision and direction, bringing new energy to the school's longstanding motto, 'Fair, friendly, fulfilling and fun'. You have taken effective action to ensure that teaching remains good throughout the school, including through the recruitment of new staff, bringing fresh experience and ideas. You have fostered valuable links for staff with neighbouring schools and international links for pupils, promoting an open and welcoming environment for learning. Pupils enjoy a rich menu of additional activities, including sports, art and music. Pupils' interests and talents, including those of the most able, are fostered well as a result. For example, more than a third of pupils learn a musical instrument at school.

Pupils continue to behave well, showing respect for one another, the school and its resources. This helps pupils to stay happy and safe, and to support one another. Your current focus on five 'values for life' supports pupils well to develop the characteristics of collaboration, curiosity, determination, creativity and independence. Pupils are enthusiastic to show how well they are developing these good habits, and recently enjoyed the opportunity to nominate animal emblems to represent each of them, for example a tortoise representing determination, a bee for collaboration and a meerkat for curiosity. This involvement engages pupils well in their learning.

Your vision is overwhelmingly shared by staff and governors. Most parents are confident that their children are cared for well and challenged to accomplish the learning of which they are capable. The great majority of parents responding to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, would recommend the school to others. Parents I spoke with were confident about the care staff provide. A minority of parents expressed concerns about the degree of challenge their children experience in their learning and that homework set for their children does not meet their expectations. You and governors are aware of these concerns and seek to reassure parents through the helpful information you provide about school policies.

You and governors are not complacent, however. You rightly aim to develop teachers' subject leadership, to increase their influence on teaching and pupils' outcomes. You are aware of the need to redouble your efforts to improve the attendance of pupils with special educational needs or disability, to ensure their best possible progress. Individual parents are of the opinion that you are too strict about pupils' absences. Governors have supported you well by meeting with parents personally to discuss this.

Safeguarding is effective.

Most parents are rightly positive about the care that staff provide. You ensure that all safeguarding requirements are met, through clear policies and secure procedures. Staff are trained well, so that any concerns are promptly reported and considered. You work well with external agencies when required, including to support pupils' attendance. Governors ensure that the required checks on staff are completed and recorded in due time.

Pupils are taught well about the risks of social media and know how to keep themselves safe. Pupils told me they have no concerns about bullying but are sure adults would step in promptly to resolve any issues which did occur. Playground supervision is ample and attentive, so that accidents and arguments can be pre-empted. A small minority of parents have concerns about bullying and whether behaviour is managed well by leaders. I found that staff are attentive to pupils' behaviour and manage this well in class and during social times. A safe and healthy school environment is conscientiously maintained by premises staff. Governors have taken seriously the local authority's advice that the height of the perimeter fence should be raised, and are actively seeking a suitable solution acceptable to neighbours.

Inspection findings

- Your leadership is ambitious and determined. Your prompt action on joining the school ensured that the improvements in teaching recommended by the last inspection have been achieved. You also ensured that pupils' progress accelerated in Year 6 so that despite some variation in their earlier learning, pupils in 2015 continued to achieve well at age 11 and were well prepared for the next stage of their education. Your evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for development is accurate. You ensure that plans for improvement appropriately involve all the staff and governors.

- Now that new teachers are well established, you rightly aim to develop their influence as subject leaders, so that all staff will share responsibility to check and continually improve pupils' outcomes.
- Governors are committed to the success of every pupil and are hard working. You provide governors with accurate reports about the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement, which they question in detail during meetings. Governors have systematic methods for checking the work detailed in the school's improvement plan and the impact this has on pupils' outcomes. Governors are aware of parents' concerns. They hold open meetings and meet parents individually, to boost parents' confidence that their views are recognised.
- Most pupils enter the school with knowledge and skills appropriate to their ages, and some with learning which is more advanced. Pupils make good progress so they achieve well, including the most able. There are no notable differences between the achievement of boys and girls, or between the very small group of pupils supported by the pupil premium and others (the pupil premium is additional government funding for pupils entitled to free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority).
- Pupils in the Reception Year make good progress from their starting points, including in phonics (letters and the sounds they make). A higher proportion of children than seen nationally achieve a good level of development by the end of Reception Year, so children are well prepared for the challenges and opportunities of Year 1 and beyond. The Reception teacher who joined the school in January promptly refreshed the provision for these pupils inside and outside, supporting a clear vision for all pupils to make even stronger progress in future.
- Good teaching during key stage 1 ensures that pupils reach standards in reading, writing and mathematics which are consistently above national averages. Phonics is taught well by teachers and teaching assistants. As a result, the proportion of Year 1 pupils who achieve the expected standard in the national phonics check consistently exceeds the national average, and continues to improve.
- Pupils make good progress overall in key stage 2. Older pupils are still being supported well to accelerate their progress before moving on to secondary school. Teaching in Years 3 and 4 builds increasingly well on pupils' success at the age of seven. Key stage 2 pupils were keen to tell me how the new library is helping them to develop their research skills and how much they value the flexibility provided by the recently introduced laptop trolleys. These facilities are benefiting all pupils, and particularly supporting the most able to take their own learning forward.
- Although a small group, the progress of most pupils with special educational needs or disability is interrupted by their irregular attendance. Sometimes, but not always, this is due to medical circumstances. You are right to focus parents' attention on the need to ensure that these pupils attend school regularly and make up for lost learning when absence is unavoidable.
- You ensure that pupils' learning includes life beyond the school, in Britain and further afield, and is enlivened by visits and visitors. For example, a scientist visited recently to help pupils understand the transit of Mercury through space, Years 5 and 6 pupils recently visited the Houses of

Parliament hosted by the local MP, and pupils are involved currently in a mock European Union referendum. French is taught throughout the school and pupils recently hosted friends from the French primary school where you have developed a partnership. Through activities such as these, and the consistent discipline, care and courtesy provided by all the staff, pupils learn well about the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, mutual respect and tolerance.

- Pupils learn well about the range of cultures present in the United Kingdom. Aspects of different religions and families' lifestyles are sensitively woven into teaching. I saw pupils in Years 3 and 4 writing with understanding about Jewish and Hindu marriage ceremonies. In Years 5 and 6, I observed pupils writing descriptively, based on their earlier research about Buddhism. Educational visits, for example to museums in London, bring pupils into valuable contact with multi-cultural city life.
- You have been well supported by the local authority (LA), during your induction in 2014 and since, particularly through the provision of expert advice and guidance. The LA has monitored the progress of the school closely, to ensure that leadership and teaching remain good. LA support is now minimal, due to the recognised success of your leadership.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers' influence as subject leaders develops, to further enrich the curriculum and pupils' outcomes
- all pupils have good, regular attendance, particularly those with special educational needs or disability.

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

Yours sincerely

Sian Thornton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to discuss your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and priorities for further improvement. With you, I observed teaching in each class, when we also looked at pupils' work in their books and I spoke with some pupils. I talked with parents in the playground at the start of the day and analysed the 29 responses to Ofsted's online survey Parent View. I talked with the house captains while observing playtime. I spoke with staff around the school and considered the 13 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. I spoke on the telephone with a representative of the local authority. A range of documents was considered, including information about teaching and pupils' achievement, the school's self-evaluation summary and improvement plan, governing body records, information about pupils' attendance and behaviour, and safeguarding checks and policies.