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21 December 2017

Miss Isabel Robson
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Robson

Short inspection of Herons Dale School

Following my visit to the school on 7 December 2017 with Rosemary Keen, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You lead with passion, commitment and a determination to ensure the best possible outcomes for pupils. Since taking up your appointment in October 2016, you have accurately identified what the school needs to do to improve. You have ensured that leaders, governors and staff work well together and, as a result, there is a renewed sense of determination to make the school even better.

Staff are incredibly proud to be part of the school. They refer to the 'huge shift' in staff morale over the past year and to the positive working atmosphere within the school. Staff told inspectors that leaders support them to develop professionally and that their ideas contribute to the school's development.

Our visits to classrooms showed the school to be a happy place. Pupils are keen to come to school and attend regularly. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive and this helps to develop pupils' confidence and self-esteem. One pupil commented: 'Teachers are really kind here and everybody is nice.'

The school has recently become part of a federation of local special schools. Because of this, the governing body has been restructured and key roles and responsibilities have been reassigned. These changes have led to an increased enthusiasm and commitment from governors to drive the school forward. Governors have worked hard to increase their knowledge and expertise in a number of key

areas. However, they need to put this newly gained knowledge into practice and not take the information that they are given by leaders at face value. This will enable them to hold leaders more rigorously to account.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All necessary pre-employment checks are completed and procedures for checking the suitability of staff to work with children are robust. Consequently, pupils feel safe and are safe.

Leaders have created a school where all staff understand their responsibilities to keep children safe. New staff receive safeguarding training before they start work at the school and existing staff receive annual safeguarding training updates. Governors play a key role in holding leaders to account for this aspect of the school's work.

Written child protection records are suitably detailed. They show that all staff are alert to possible concerns and report these to the designated safeguarding lead in a timely manner. Early help referrals are used effectively by the school to support vulnerable pupils and their families beyond the school gate.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection we agreed to look at the effectiveness of safeguarding: how well the school supports parents, how leaders are ensuring that teachers have high expectations of pupils and how staff are enabling pupils to become as independent as possible.
- Parents are full of praise for the support that they receive from the school. Parents state that communication between home and school keeps them up to date with the progress that their children are making, both academically and personally. For example, one parent stated: 'I enjoy receiving pictures and videos from the school's app and feel like the school really want us to be involved and aware of all they do.' Parents also have the opportunity to attend well-considered workshops regularly, including an annual online safety awareness event aimed at supporting pupils' safety at home.
- The thorough assessments that take place in Reception ensure that children's starting points are accurately determined. Staff know the children well and use this knowledge to inform their planning. Consequently, children in Reception make rapid progress in all aspects of their learning.
- Because of teachers' high expectations, inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' work and observations in classrooms demonstrate that pupils are making good progress over time. Leaders have correctly identified that progress in science needs to improve in order to be in line with other subjects. However, pupils' outcomes in this subject are still strong.
- Most pupils are making good or better progress in a range of subjects. School leaders track the progress of pupils well in English, mathematics and science, and this enables them to identify when pupils are at risk of falling behind.

New systems for assessing pupils' progress are comprehensive. However, in order for leaders to evaluate the impact that the school is having on all aspects of pupils' development, pupils' progress beyond the academic subjects needs to be monitored and assessed.

- Pupils develop their independence skills well at school. Pupils are encouraged to collect their own learning resources and take responsibility for their own equipment, where possible. Staff use communication strategies to good effect and this enables pupils to become independent learners. However, occasionally teachers' planning does not sufficiently meet the needs of all pupils. Consequently, this can result in pupils being over-reliant on adult support to complete tasks.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff use the information about what pupils can already do and understand to plan learning that challenges pupils
- they continue to develop the skills and expertise within the governing body so that leaders are held rigorously to account for all aspects of the school's performance
- they develop ways to evaluate the impact that the school has on pupils' non-academic outcomes so that progress in these areas can be monitored.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, 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

Emma Sanderson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and your senior leadership team at the start of the day. We discussed your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and agreed the key areas that we would focus on during the inspection. During the day, I held further discussions with you. I met with the co-chairs of the governing body. Inspectors observed teaching in 10 lessons, most jointly with senior leaders. We also scrutinised pupils' work with middle leaders. We took account of two pupil survey responses, 30 staff survey responses and 19 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 13 free-text responses. Inspectors spoke with parents before school and with staff and pupils throughout the school day. Inspectors analysed a range of the school's documentation, including leaders'

checks on pupils' progress, the quality of teaching and learning, performance management information, and safeguarding policies and procedures. A telephone discussion was held with the local authority school improvement consultant linked to the school.