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Mr Neil Meehan
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Dear Mr Meehan

Short inspection of Ashford CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 25 September 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 January 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Staff turnover since the last inspection has been high. The school has had a significant change in leadership in the last three weeks alone. You joined Ashford in September as executive headteacher. One of the deputy headteachers has been promoted to head of school, and you have made three new appointments to the senior leadership team. Five teachers have also started at the school this term.

Since your arrival, you have lost no time in increasing the pace of improvement. Under your leadership, staff have been energised, and there is a collective excitement about the future. Your knowledgeable and enthusiastic middle leaders are ready and willing to contribute to whole-school improvements. Until recently they have not had the chance to do this. All staff who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire said that they enjoy working at the school. You have promptly identified the school's strengths and priorities. Your actions are appropriately focused on the right things, and there are some early signs of improvement.

Pupils told me that they love coming to 'ACE'. They said the behaviour of other children is good and that 'teachers are only strict when they need to be'. They especially enjoy educational trips, playing football on the school field and taking part in their various learning projects. The vast majority of parents who spoke to me or who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were positive, saying

that their children are happy at the school. As one parent commented: 'My daughter absolutely loves this school. She goes in smiling and comes out smiling.'

Attendance figures have been below the national average in recent years. The proportion of pupils who are frequently absent is high. Despite a slightly improving picture, leaders acknowledge that ensuring that all pupils attend school more regularly is a continual focus for the school.

The areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection have only been partially addressed. The priority was to ensure that pupils make consistently rapid and sustained progress. The progress that pupils currently make in the school is variable. Until recently, school leaders had not picked up poor progress quickly enough. This has resulted in a decline in attainment, particularly at the end of key stage 1.

Leaders were also asked to ensure that all staff consistently put into practice the school's new systems for improving teaching. During our classroom visits and scrutiny of pupils' work, we agreed that the quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent. We saw in pupils' work that some expectations are too low, that teaching is not consistently well matched to pupils' needs and that assessment is, at times, not accurate.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a strong culture of safeguarding awareness in the school, and communication between staff is strong. Policies and procedures are fit for purpose, and day-to-day routines are secure. Governors regularly monitor to make sure that the school's safeguarding processes are working well.

Pre-employment checks demonstrate leaders' thorough action in ensuring the suitability of all staff and volunteers to work in school. Safeguarding training is regular, up to date and well planned. Leaders regularly check that all the staff are aware of their duty of care. Staff are confident in how to take appropriate action to protect vulnerable pupils.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and know who to talk to if they have any worries. They said that bullying is rare and that teachers 'deal with it well' when it does happen. As one parent commented: 'This is a lovely school. My daughter continues to learn, make friendships and grow in a happy, safe environment.' Pupils show a good understanding of the different types of bullying, and older pupils are fully aware of how to keep themselves safe online.

Inspection findings

- At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed that we would focus on: how effectively reading is taught in the school; how well leaders ensure high outcomes in writing and mathematics in key stage 1; and how leaders and governors ensure that the school continues to improve.

- Pupils enjoy reading. They especially enjoy the reading buddies scheme, where older pupils support the reading of younger pupils. As one Year 5 pupil said to me, 'I like the feeling I can teach someone and have an impact on their life.' The teaching of phonics is a strength. In 2018, 92% of the pupils reached the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check, and the results have been similarly high in recent years. However, these high levels of attainment are not maintained. Pupils do not apply their phonetic knowledge well to their reading or writing. The quality of teaching is inconsistent, leading to pupils not making the strong progress of which they are capable. The 2018 unvalidated performance information for the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2 indicates that the proportions of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading are likely to be below that seen nationally at both key stages. Leaders also acknowledge that work does not always challenge pupils sufficiently to enable them to make good progress.
- Provisional performance information for key stage 1 indicates that the proportion of pupils who attained the expected standard in writing and in mathematics in 2018 is likely to be below that seen nationally. Assessment is not accurate, and staff do not have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve, particularly in their written work. The teaching of basic skills and spelling is variable and not enough pupils are working at the standard appropriate for their age. Teaching is not always suited to pupils' needs, and sometimes pupils lose interest in their learning. The new leadership team has identified that improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is an urgent priority for the school.
- Until recently, leaders did not routinely check the quality of teaching or give regular feedback to staff. Consequently, leaders were unable to identify and address any weaknesses quickly when they arose. Leaders have begun to challenge practice that is not helping pupils to learn effectively. They provide clear guidance on what staff need to do to improve. A culture of open and professional dialogue is developing. The new leadership team has already started to develop the role of the middle leader. Leaders at all levels are now contributing to whole-school improvements. You acknowledge that more needs to be done to ensure that middle leaders have an impact on sustaining improvements to teaching and learning.
- The wider curriculum is a strength of the school. Leaders ensure that there is a strong progression of skills through a range of subjects, with a clear focus on the development of vocabulary. Pupils are making stronger progress in the wider curriculum than they are in English and mathematics.
- Governance of the school is strategic and strong. Governors are very knowledgeable about the school's strengths and those areas that are not good enough. They validate what leaders tell them through accurate analysis of school improvement and assessment information. They challenge the school when this is not good enough. Governors have high aspirations for the achievement of all pupils. Leaders are well supported by a representative from the Diocese of London who knows the school's needs well.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- rates of attendance match or exceed national averages, with a sharp focus on those pupils who are regularly absent
- they improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, so that a greater proportion of pupils reach and exceed the standards expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics, by:
 - increasing teachers' expectations of what pupils should achieve for their age and ability
 - ensuring that accurate assessment of pupils' attainment, particularly, but not solely, in key stage 1, helps teachers plan suitably challenging learning
- the role of middle leaders is strengthened so that they can contribute effectively to whole-school improvements.

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

Yours sincerely

Lea Hannam
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your senior leadership team to discuss the school's effectiveness. With your head of school, I visited classrooms to observe pupils learning, talk to pupils and look at their work. With your senior leadership team, I looked at the quality of work in pupils' books. I considered 107 responses from parents to the online questionnaire, Parent View, including free-text comments. I also spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day. Responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil questionnaires were considered and I had a meeting with a group of pupils to discuss their views about the school.

I met with five governors, including the chair of the local governing body. I also met with a representative from the Diocese of London. In addition, I met with a group of middle leaders and held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. I evaluated the school's safeguarding arrangements. A wide range of documents were considered, including: the school's self-evaluation; school improvement planning; attendance information; information about pupils' progress; and various policies. I also reviewed the school's website.