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Mrs Stephanie Praetig  
Headteacher  
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Isle of Wight  
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Dear Mrs Praetig

### **Short inspection of Cowes Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 28 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 your school was judged to be good in November 2011.

#### **Context**

There have been some changes in the school since it was last inspected. Notably, the school has a new chair and vice-chair of the governing body. Some teaching and support staff have left and others have been newly appointed. There has been turbulence for pupils in Year 4 this academic year due to staff changes. Both you and the deputy headteacher support local schools in need of strong leadership. As a result of the reorganisation of schools on the Isle of Wight, numbers of pupils at the school are reducing.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Together with the governing body, you have tackled weaknesses in the school effectively and built on existing strengths. A good example is the significant improvement made to the quality of the leadership and management of mathematics. Furthermore, the good provision in the early years has improved further. A much higher proportion of pupils than in most schools reach a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year.

You have developed a strong and effective leadership team. Senior leaders have become particularly adept at holding staff to account for the progress made by pupils. This, together with the implementation of the revised curriculum, has raised teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve. Leaders, staff and governors work closely together to help the school to improve. For example, all are involved in

school self-evaluation and the development of improvement plans. The plans include clear performance indicators against which the progress of the school can be checked.

Governors ensure the school provides a good programme of personal, social, health and spiritual education. This helps pupils to learn about fundamental British values, including what it means to live in a democratic society. Older pupils ran their own 'in-school referendum' in which pupils voted about whether or not the United Kingdom should remain in the European Union.

At the time of the last inspection, leaders and managers were asked to improve the achievement of pupils in writing, particularly at key stage 1. They were also asked to improve the consistency of teaching and learning across the school, by ensuring all teachers use assessment information effectively to inform their planning.

Strong leadership of literacy across the school has helped teachers to improve their practice and this in turn has led to pupils making much better progress in writing at both key stages 1 and 2. All teachers now make effective use of assessment information to inform their planning. The vast majority plan appropriate activities to cater for the different learning needs of their pupils.

Despite significant improvements to the leadership of mathematics, there is not enough bespoke training for the very few staff whose subject knowledge of mathematics is not a strength. Consequently, the quality of teaching and learning of mathematics, particularly in lower key stage 2, does not always build as well as it could on pupils' previous learning.

The overall quality of teaching across the school is good and some elements are outstanding. However, in Years 3 and 4, it is not always good enough for the most able in mathematics. Despite the good progress made by pupils in Year 6 this year, few pupils are currently set to exceed age-related expectations by the end of key stage 2, particularly in mathematics.

Pupils told me that they feel happy and safe at school, and that their teachers are kind and caring. This is fully supported by the pupils who responded to the questionnaire. Pupils also appreciate the high quality of their school dinners. Some spoke enthusiastically about the fact that the school kitchen uses local produce, and that the meals are healthy.

Staff ensure that pupils are particularly well cared for. This includes those who have medical needs, special educational needs or disabilities. Staff encourage pupils to collaborate and help each other. At the time of the inspection, I observed older readers helping younger pupils to practise their reading at the start of the school day. From my discussions with pupils and observations, pupils enjoy sharing books and appreciate the wide range of books available to them in the school library.

All of the staff that responded to the questionnaire say they are proud to be a member of staff at the school. From their responses to the online survey, the vast

majority of parents feel their child is happy and safe at school. Most believe their child is well taught and is making good progress. This was echoed by the parents that spoke to me at the beginning of the school day. A few expressed concern about the proposed reorganisation of classes.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team ensures that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. The single central record is fully compliant. It is well organised and checked regularly by the headteacher and safeguarding governor. Senior leaders deal swiftly and effectively with any safeguarding concerns that arise. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe when using the internet. They feel confident about approaching a member of staff should they have any concerns. Their knowledge of the potential dangers of extremism and radicalisation is in the early stages of development.

### **Inspection findings**

- Senior leaders have worked closely and effectively with advisers from Hampshire local authority to improve the quality of teaching, particularly in English and mathematics. As a result of the improvements this has made to teachers' skills, the vast majority of teaching is consistently good or better.
- Senior leaders have strengthened wider leadership across the school. Consequently, responsibilities are distributed well among staff.
- The quality of leadership and management of English is a strength. There is particularly good support and training for staff to help pupils make good progress in reading and writing.
- Together with the support from Hampshire local authority, senior leaders have developed a new system for tracking the progress of pupils. This provides accurate and helpful information for teachers, senior leaders and governors about how well pupils are progressing.
- Governors make a good contribution to the strategic leadership and direction of the school. They use key performance indicators that can be measured, in order to hold senior leaders to account. Governors now check information for themselves by visiting the school and observing pupil progress meetings and reviews of the quality of pupils' work.
- Governors ensure that additional funding through the pupil premium has been used particularly well to improve the reading and writing skills of disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, the vast majority of pupils met the expected standard of the phonics screening check for Year 1 this year. (Phonics refers to letters and the sounds that they make). Pupils also all make particularly good progress with their reading and writing at key stage 1.
- The senior leadership team checks the quality of teaching and learning rigorously. This is followed by whole-staff training to further improve teachers' practice. However, this is not always matched to the individual training needs of some staff. Consequently, not all teachers have become

equally adept at planning mathematical tasks that promote mastery and consistently good levels of progress for the most able pupils.

- Leaders and managers have worked effectively with parents to improve the attendance of pupils. As a result, levels of attendance have risen and are currently above last year's national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is improving as a result of the school's work with parents. However, it remains a little behind the attendance levels of other pupils.
- Leaders and managers are of the view that the published performance information, for the last two years, about the progress made by pupils from key stage 1 to key stage 2 is not entirely reliable. The past key stage 1 information used as a starting point to measure key stage 2 progress was produced when the school was not an all-through primary and was inflated. Given the overall good rates of progress seen during this inspection, this would help to explain why the published progress information for the school for the last two years looks poor, when pupils' progress is in fact good.
- The vast majority of pupils make good progress given their starting points, particularly in reading and writing. During this inspection good evidence of this was seen in lessons, the school's internal performance information and the work in pupils' books. Senior leaders recognise the current need to compensate for some underperformance in mathematics in the past. On the whole, leaders, managers and teachers are working effectively to help pupils to catch up.
- Teachers place a strong emphasis on the teaching of core skills in writing. This has led to a significant improvement in pupils' comprehension skills, their grammar, spelling and punctuation, particularly for boys and disadvantaged pupils.
- Teaching makes effective use of resources and activities that enthuse pupils and engage their interests fully. An example of this was observed in Year 5, with pupils learning to write from a character's point of view. This followed their study of Greek mythology about Theseus and the Minotaur. Pupils were proud to show me the progress they had made in their writing from the beginning of the year. They stated that they were spurred on to strive to reach even higher standards by the good progress they had already made.
- At key stage 1, teachers use books and stories very effectively as starting points to support pupils with their writing. They make good use of topics such as 'Space' to engage boys in particular with writing activities.
- In Year 2, pupils use adjectives confidently in their creative writing. They are learning the difference between verbs and adverbs. The most able have progressed from using basic punctuation at the beginning of the year to now using apostrophes, speech and exclamation marks. At the beginning of the year, the most able wrote using simple sentences. They now write using complex sentences that often include conjunctions such as 'because'. One pupil wrote 'She was called Crunchy because she had a gleaming tiara'.
- Teachers' strong subject knowledge, particularly in Years 5 and 6, helps pupils' learning to progress at a good pace. Teachers in Years 5 and 6 typically check pupils' learning and progress very well during the course of

lessons and encourage pupils to help each other to check and improve their work.

- Pupils in Year 6 use alliteration confidently in their writing. The work in their books highlights their ability to write well and at length. Pupils are becoming more confident at using the correct tense. They make good use of punctuation and from the evidence seen in pupils' books, the disadvantaged and the most able have made good progress in their writing since the beginning of this year.
- Standards in mathematics have improved year on year and are higher by the end of Year 6 than at the time of the last inspection. Disadvantaged pupils are doing particularly well in key stage 1 and are currently making better progress than their peers.
- At key stage 2, the best progress being made in mathematics is in Year 6.
- Progress in Years 3 and 4 is not as strong as in the rest of the school. Senior leaders are taking appropriate action which is helping to accelerate the progress pupils make in mathematics in this part of the school.
- With the exception of Years 3 and 4, the most able pupils are provided with consistently good levels of challenge in mathematics.
- In mathematics at key stage 2, older pupils are confident in the use of addition, subtraction, decimals, place value and multiplication to solve complex problems. They are less confident about fractions and algebra.
- In discussions with pupils, some told me that they were surprised to have enjoyed doing the recent tests. They recognise that, although they were worried about taking the tests, their teachers had prepared them well. One pupil said 'I didn't expect it to be so much fun'. This highlights how well teachers have helped pupils to develop resilience in dealing with challenging tasks.
- As a result of stronger teaching and effective additional support, gaps in progress between different groups of pupils are closing, albeit slowly, across the school.
- The proportion of pupils set to exceed age-related expectations in English and mathematics across the school is increasing; however this still remains low in Year 6.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is clear guidance for staff about how to promote the mastery of mathematical skills through bespoke training and within curriculum guidance
- the teaching of mathematics in lower key stage 2 builds more effectively on pupils' learning and progress from the previous year
- teaching across the school enables a higher proportion of the most able pupils to exceed age-related expectations, particularly in mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Gehane Gordelier  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, your deputy headteacher, staff and three governors, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. I spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone. Senior leaders joined me on two learning walks observing teaching and learning in six classes across key stages 1 and 2. I spoke to pupils in lessons, at playtime and around the school. I looked at a sample of pupils' work and took account of school data about progress and standards. I reviewed a range of school documentation including notes of visits produced by the local authority. I reviewed the school's single central record and scrutinised the school's safeguarding procedures including policies. I spoke to a small number of parents at the beginning of the school day. I took account of 32 responses to the online survey (Parent View). I also reviewed 35 responses to the questionnaire completed by staff and 58 responses to the questionnaire completed by pupils.