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Mr Jason Anderson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Anderson

Short inspection of Romsey Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 30 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. Senior leaders and governors have a clear mission for the school, enabling all pupils to achieve their best and make good progress. This mission is equally true for pupils' social and emotional development as it is for their academic achievement. You summarised this aim as 'enabling everyone to be incredible'. Staff take pride in the family culture of the school, in which everyone is known and cared for. Parents endorse this view, with many explaining how this caring approach has had a hugely positive impact on their children. One parent, representing the views of many, said: 'The staff have an amazing ability to get the best out of my son academically, physically and emotionally.'

Pupils love coming to school. They say that lessons are enjoyable because teachers make tasks exciting both inside and outside the classroom. Pupils appreciate how staff explain and demonstrate learning when they are struggling to understand, and that this helps them to become successful learners. One pupil said, 'Teachers make you feel clever.' Pupils know that further challenge will always be provided if they find their work too easy. As a result, the most able pupils make strong progress. In most pupils' books, work is neatly presented because teachers demand high standards. This demonstrates that leaders have successfully tackled two areas for improvement from the previous inspection.

Senior leaders provide all staff with individualised training and professional development so that they can meet the requirements of their roles and responsibilities to a high standard. Whenever a new initiative is introduced or a new

priority for school improvement is identified, there is always specific training to support it. Consequently, teachers and teaching assistants have good subject knowledge. This ensures that staff are well equipped to check pupils' understanding and to ask searching questions to challenge and deepen their thinking so that they can take the next steps in their learning. Morale among staff is high. All who responded to Ofsted's online survey and all those I spoke with enjoy their roles and feel proud to be working at the school.

Pupils across the school, including the disadvantaged, make strong progress. In the past, pupils have not achieved as well in writing as they have done in reading and mathematics. Leaders have made the teaching of writing a priority. This has resulted in improved writing outcomes in 2018, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. However, work still needs to be done to fully embed these recent improvements and ensure that the teaching of writing is consistently strong across the school.

Children get off to a strong start in the early years, including in Nursery. Staff quickly get to know children and their parents, winning their confidence. They explore children's interests and use this knowledge to plan activities that fully engage them. Consequently, children settle very quickly, behave well and develop very positive attitudes to learning. One parent said: 'The children are valued, loved and nurtured and, as a result, they are kind, caring and confident.' Children make good progress and are ready for the increased challenge of Year 1. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development has been above the national average in recent years.

The curriculum offers pupils a wide and varied diet of learning experiences across the full range of subjects. Visits to such places as Stonehenge and the Isle of Wight, together with presentations from interesting people in school, bring the curriculum to life. The wider curriculum includes opportunities for pupils to take up positions of responsibility and extend their learning beyond the school day by participating in various after-school clubs. However, leaders need to strengthen the curriculum further so that pupils achieve as well in foundation subjects as they do in English and mathematics.

In recent years, the overall level of attendance has been below the national average, and noticeably lower for disadvantaged pupils. This was something identified as needing improvement at the last inspection. Although there are signs that pupils' attendance is improving this academic year, action to ensure that pupils attend regularly needs greater urgency.

Safeguarding is effective.

The well-being of pupils is at the heart of this inclusive school. Senior leaders and governors have ensured that there is a strong culture of safeguarding, underpinned by detailed policies, protocols and procedures. All staff have received up-to-date training so that they are vigilant to any signs that a pupil may be at risk. They report their concerns quickly. They understand that even relatively minor concerns

could be an important part of a bigger picture and so need to be reported promptly.

Pupils are confident that staff have their best interests at heart and will take care of them. They say that there is always someone to help them with any worries they have. Pupils describe the adults in the school as 'trustworthy' and 'reassuring'. Bullying is rare and dealt with effectively. Pupils feel safe and the overwhelming majority of parents agree that their children are safe in school.

The curriculum provides many opportunities for pupils to learn about staying safe, including when on the road, around fire and when online. Pupils have a good understanding of the potential hazards of being online and how to avoid them.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, I looked closely at three aspects of the school's work. The first aspect focused on the effectiveness of leaders' and governors' actions to improve pupils' outcomes in writing. Senior leaders have used two main approaches to improve the quality of writing across the school. The first approach ensures that teachers use a range of rich texts when planning lessons. This has sparked pupils' enthusiasm for their own work and uses high-quality texts as examples for pupils to follow. During our learning walk, we saw pupils in Year 5 discussing 'Holes' by Louis Sachar. Pupils were excited and engaged and had evidently developed their appetite for writing. We also saw some excellent pupils' writing which had been inspired by Philip Pullman's books.
- The second approach to improve the quality of pupils' writing has been the restructuring of the way grammar and punctuation are taught. Teachers identify when pupils will need to use different aspects of grammar in their writing and plan lessons accordingly. In this way, pupils have an immediate opportunity to apply this 'new' knowledge in their own writing. This ensures that pupils understand the purpose of the punctuation or grammatical rule and appreciate its usefulness. Advisers from the local authority have provided valuable training and expertise to teachers to support the drive to improve pupils' writing. Although the teaching of writing has improved markedly, one or two minor inconsistencies remain, where teachers' expectations of pupils are not as high as where teaching is most effective.
- The next aspect of the school's work I focused on was whether the wider curriculum meets the needs of all pupils and enables them to achieve well. Teachers plan regular opportunities for pupils to apply their learning in reading and writing in other subjects, especially science and the humanities. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about art lessons and their use of a variety of materials and media. Displays of work around the school are evidence of pupils' high-quality work. Physical education and games also have a high profile in the curriculum.
- Middle leaders understand their important role in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects and in how well pupils achieve. Middle leaders use a variety of activities to check that their subject is taught well and that there is appropriate coverage. However, the overall standard of pupils' achievement in foundation subjects is lower than that in English and

mathematics.

- The third aspect of the school's work considered in this inspection was how senior leaders and governors ensure that pupils attend school regularly. This included leaders' work to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Overall levels of pupils' attendance had been below the national average until 2017, when senior leaders were successful in reducing pupils' absence. However, during the 2017/18 academic year, pupils' attendance dipped below the national average again. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has been below the national average since 2015.
- Senior leaders understand the importance of pupils attending school regularly and work hard to impress this on parents. When necessary, they have issued fines to parents in response to pupils' unauthorised absence. Leaders evaluate attendance carefully, including that of different groups of pupils. They were able to provide convincing evidence that the unusually high levels of absence last year were due to outbreaks of chicken pox and flu. Although there are signs that attendance is slowly improving, senior leaders and governors must redouble their efforts to reduce pupils' absence.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching across the curriculum improves further so that pupils' progress in the foundation subjects is strengthened
- improvements in the teaching of writing are fully embedded so that pupils' outcomes continue to improve and any remaining inconsistencies disappear
- there is greater urgency in the work to make sure that pupils attend school regularly so that the school's overall attendance is at least in line with the national average.

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

Yours sincerely

Bruce Waelend
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and the deputy headteacher to discuss various aspects of the school's work. I also met with the deputy headteacher and three middle leaders to discuss the curriculum. I held a meeting with six members of the governing body, including the chair of governors, to discuss their school improvement work. I spoke

to a representative of the local authority on the telephone. Together, you and I visited classes in all year groups, observing teaching and learning, talking to pupils about their work and looking at their books. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school, including at breaktime. Several pupils spoke with me on the playground during morning play. I also had a meeting with 12 pupils from Years 1 to 6 to gather their views of the school.

I considered 14 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 35 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 22 free-text comments. I spoke to a number of parents in the playground at the end of the day and took into account three letters from parents. A range of documents was looked at, including: the school's self-evaluation; school improvement plans; attendance information; and safeguarding policies, procedures and checks.