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Mr Damien Jordan
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Jordan

Short inspection of Fairlight Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 December 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 December 2014.

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 a dedicated and enthusiastic team that works hard for the benefit of all pupils. The school's inclusive ethos is a great strength. Parents are particularly positive about this aspect of Fairlight, which truly reflects and serves the local community in which it is situated.

Classroom visits showed the school to be a happy place. Pupils were working hard and were proud to show me their work. Staff are knowledgeable. Many have additional expertise that they put to good use, for example in supporting pupils' speech and language development. Teachers' expectations are high. This is particularly the case for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds. My experience when visiting classrooms reflected the views you shared with me at the start of the inspection about the strengths of the school. The progress in improving the teaching of mathematics was clear to see. Pupils' books showed me that staff have appropriate expectations, including providing additional challenge for most-able pupils when needed. As a result, most pupils, including those from vulnerable groups, are making good progress across the school.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. Older pupils told me how much the school has changed for the better in the last four years and how much they enjoy the extra activities and trips that they undertake. Your work in improving the learning environment, including the chances for all pupils to learn through play, is beginning to pay dividends in the way that pupils engage in learning. Importantly, their

attendance has improved dramatically in the last two years and is now broadly in line with the national average for primary schools.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors acknowledged the many strengths of the school. These included the teaching being consistently good, and the curriculum meeting the needs of all pupils well. Inspectors also acknowledged the strengths seen in the early years, and acknowledged that pupils behaved well in lessons and as they moved around the school. They also recognised that leaders at all levels needed to be more involved in improving teaching and learning, and that teachers should be more consistent when checking pupils' progress during lessons. These matters have been addressed successfully. Classroom visits showed me that staff constantly check pupils' understanding. Teachers' questioning skills are well developed, and I was able to see first-hand evidence of staff giving pupils additional support or moving learning on when they needed to. My discussions with your assistant headteachers and subject and phase leads showed me that leaders at all levels are having a positive impact on improving the school.

Since the last inspection, you have continued the important process of self-evaluation. You were able to explain the school's many strengths as well as the priorities for development. You recognise that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds need to make better progress across the school if their achievements are to improve to match those of other pupils. We agreed that pupils' phonics skills have improved greatly in the last two years, but that key staff would benefit from additional training and resources. You also agreed with me that your self-evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and the way that it informs development planning, needs to be refined. This will allow leaders, staff and governors to focus more sharply on the key priorities to improve the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Arrangements to safeguard pupils are effective and fit for purpose. Procedures and day-to-day routines to ensure that pupils and staff are safe at school are sound. Importantly, the culture to safeguard pupils is strong. Your staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities to protect children. Their training is up to date. They know what to do and who to talk to if they have concerns.

All parents who spoke to me or completed Ofsted's online survey expressed the opinion that their children are happy and feel safe in school. Pupils told me that they feel safe at Fairlight. They shared that they feel staff care for them and that any problems in the playground or with friendship groups are dealt with quickly when they arise.

Inspection findings

- The school's provisional results in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 in 2018 were not as strong as in previous years. While pupils' progress in reading and writing matched those seen in most other primary schools, their progress in mathematics dipped to below average. Leaders had anticipated this, and work to

improve teaching and learning in mathematics across the school has been a priority in the last year. Additional training for staff, the effective use of mathematics resources and a focus on developing pupils' reasoning skills are already improving teaching and learning in mathematics. Classroom visits, including scrutiny of pupils' work, showed promising progress in this area.

- The school's work on improving pupils' phonics skills since the last inspection has been successful. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in phonics in Year 1 has almost doubled since 2015. Phonics outcomes in 2018 were the best ever, but still just below the national average. Leaders should continue their focus on improving the school's provision for phonics. Key staff require further training, and resources to be further rationalised, to ensure that pupils' experience of phonics is more consistent across the early years and key stage 1.
- Leaders understand the need to prioritise improving the quality of education for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Staff understand the importance of ensuring that this vulnerable group, many of whom have additional needs, are supported well and challenged to do their best. They also understand that these pupils still need to make better progress in reading, writing and mathematics across the school if their achievements are to improve to match those of other pupils. This is a priority for school improvement going forward.
- Self-evaluation of the school's strengths is sound, but leaders' evaluations of the main areas for development lack clarity. This means that improvement planning does not focus clearly enough on the key priorities that the school needs to improve. Linking self-evaluation and improvement planning in a more concise way will enable leaders, governors and staff to have greater understanding of the main areas they wish to develop, as well as the specific actions required to achieve success.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds make better progress in reading, writing and mathematics across all phases of the school
- the recent successes in enhancing the quality of phonics teaching are built on further so that pupils' phonics skills improve even more
- the school's processes and systems for self-evaluation and improvement planning are reviewed and refined so that leaders, governors and staff can focus more sharply on the key areas that the school needs to improve.

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Close
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I visited classrooms, assessing the progress that pupils were making and talking to them about their learning. I observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms at the start of the school day and as they moved around the school. I met with you and other leaders, the chair of governors, who was accompanied by three other governors, teaching and non-teaching support staff, and also with a group of pupils. I talked to parents at the start of the school day and took into account 67 replies to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire and accompanying text messages. I met with a representative of the local authority. A wide range of documentation was scrutinised, including safeguarding records, pupils' progress information, the school's self-evaluation and development planning, policies, and minutes of governing body meetings.