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Mr Julian Rose
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Rose

Short inspection of Holmfirth Junior Infant and Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 16 May 2017, 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You began your headship in January 2016 and have led with passion and commitment to enable pupils to achieve a high standard of education. With the support of the governing body, you have successfully brought about rapid improvements. For example, you have developed a wider team of leaders who are taking greater responsibility for school improvement and share a collective responsibility for pupils' outcomes. However, you are not complacent, despite pupils' strong achievement overall at the end of each key stage. You recognise that achievement in mathematics was relatively weaker than that in reading and writing in 2016 and this has also been the case historically. Actions taken to redress the balance are starting to make a difference for current pupils. By sharpening systems for accountability, based on precise actions identified through self-evaluation, you will be in a position to further increase the pace of these improvements.

You have further developed the curriculum to incorporate a breadth of opportunities and experiences which pupils relish. The variety within the school curriculum is captured on the school's website, which shows pictures highlighting the pupils' learning each day. Through your focus on the school's clear values last year, pupils have a strong sense of self and are developing as well-rounded individuals. They contribute with enthusiasm to the school and wider community. Your focus this year on well-being is another example of your determination to support pupils' personal

development. Pupils are benefiting from exploring the importance of physical and mental health in order for them to thrive and achieve academically.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The training staff receive means that they are effective in recognising and responding to signs of concern.

Pupils say that they feel safe and well looked after and parents agree. Pupils talk confidently about what bullying is and its different forms. They say that bullying is rare and that 'befrienders' are available to sort out more minor friendship problems. Behaviour is very good and pupils show good attitudes to their learning. The vast majority of parents feel that staff respond well to any concerns they raise and take appropriate action to resolve matters.

The curriculum provides countless opportunities to support pupils in being safe. Consequently, they talk confidently about how to stay safe, for example when they are online, crossing the road or in the event of a fire. The curriculum is also effectively supporting pupils to develop tolerance and respect. Therefore, pupils talk with conviction about how important it is to treat people equally.

Inspection findings

- Teachers have had access to a wide range of training and development opportunities to enable them to continually develop the quality of their teaching. Leaders make a range of checks to make sure that pupils are making the necessary progress. Leaders have made effective use of staff meeting time to involve teachers in collectively reviewing the progress made by a sample of pupils. This has helped teachers develop a better understanding of how to support pupils to make as much progress as possible.
- Governors are new to their roles but have taken action to get to know the school and its processes quickly. They are developing the skills to enable them to challenge with greater rigour. They are aware that the next step is for leaders to more accurately identify the precise next steps for development as part of the school self-evaluation cycle. This will ensure that the school improvement plan captures the most pressing priorities. Specific leaders can then be held to account for the impact of their actions on pupils' achievement.
- Leaders have created a school assessment system which is successful in identifying the specific needs and next steps for individuals. The information is becoming increasingly accurate and reliable. The process has raised teachers' awareness of the expectations at the end of each key stage. This has been beneficial in supporting many pupils, especially the most able, to exceed the expected standards. In addition, teachers are making effective plans to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities so that they make good gains in their learning. Any gaps in pupils' learning are identified and teachers and leaders plan intervention activities to overcome any difficulties. A team, including a teacher and teaching assistants, then provides bespoke support

for each individual or group. Consequently, pupils are making good progress overall and teachers are being held more accountable for their pupils' outcomes through discussions at pupils' progress meetings.

- You have identified that pupils' ability to reason and explain their thinking sometimes holds them back in their learning. Therefore, your school improvement priority this year has been focusing on this aspect of pupils' learning. It is evident that teachers, through training, have developed a greater awareness of how to plan opportunities for pupils to share their thinking and justify their reasoning. This is supporting pupils' development across the curriculum. This is clearly evident in the reasoning portfolios which teachers have produced to showcase the activities pupils have taken part in. Reasoning has been particularly important in mathematics, where achievement has historically lagged behind that in reading and writing. Outcomes over time and in 2016 have been consistently strong overall. By the end of key stage 2, pupils in 2016 made progress which was broadly in line with the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. However, you acknowledge that progress in mathematics was slightly weaker, resulting in attainment only being in line with national figures at the high standard; whereas, in reading and writing, attainment was above national figures at the expected standard and the higher standard. There is still some work to do to bring achievement in mathematics in line with reading and writing. Early indications from school assessment information show that there have been some improvements in the pace of pupils' progress. Current pupils are starting to use reasoning more frequently in their mathematics work but recording of this is sometimes limited in pupils' books. Leaders now need to develop greater consistency of approach throughout school. You appreciate that, without a named mathematics leader though, it is more difficult to hold leaders to account for the impact of their actions on pupils' outcomes. You already have plans to improve the clarity in leaders' roles and responsibilities. This will support you in more rigorously holding leaders to account and achieving more rapid improvements in the identified school improvement priorities.
- In early years, the proportion of pupils achieving a good level of development has dropped slightly in the last two years. By 2016, achievement was much more in line with national figures than above, as it had been previously. You are aware that, given children's typical starting points on entry to Nursery, this does not demonstrate strong enough progress for some pupils, especially boys. While leaders have not identified this in the school's self-evaluation, a greater proportion of current children are on track to reach a good level of development by the end of Reception this year. Additionally, the achievement of boys is currently no different to that of other boys nationally.
- Reading has continued to be a strength since the previous inspection. Pupils are developing their early reading skills and phonics well in early years and key stage 1. Attainment in phonics has remained consistently in line with national figures overall in Years 1 and 2. In 2016, there was a slight dip below the national average but several pupils had joined the school during Year 1. Those pupils are now making very good progress and the ones who did not meet the expected standard at the end of Year 1 are on track to do so by the end of Year 2.

- While attendance and persistent absence overall are better than the national averages, attendance and persistent absence for disadvantaged pupils were in the bottom 10% nationally in 2016. This year, there are improvements for this group of pupils. However, the impact of leaders' actions is not currently monitored with enough rigour to enable the most effective strategies to be employed in each case.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is greater rigour in the school's self-evaluation and action planning processes in order to more accurately identify priorities for improvement and precisely measure the impact on pupils' outcomes
- there is greater clarity in the roles and responsibilities of middle and senior leaders so that leaders are held more effectively to account for the impact of their actions
- mathematics teaching continues to develop so that achievement is as strong as it is in reading and writing.

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

Yours sincerely

Kirsty Godfrey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, middle leaders, a representative from the local authority and three members of the governing body. I evaluated documentation including the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan, information about pupils' progress, monitoring records, attendance records and information about safeguarding. I spoke with several parents and a group of pupils from a range of year groups. We visited classrooms together to observe teaching and learning and scrutinised pupils' work in books. I also listened to pupils read.