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Mr Warren Gargan
Acting Headteacher
Newlands Primary School
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Dear Mr Gargan

Short inspection of Newlands Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 December 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 the school was judged to be good in October 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since taking up your position in September, you have quickly grasped the school's many strengths and set about addressing the key aspects that need to improve. The pace of change in classrooms is tangible, although you are ensuring that the school's distinct 'family' ethos is protected.

Governors know the school increasingly well. They are committed and passionate about their roles and are very keen to ensure that they carry out their statutory duties in an effective manner. They understand that the appointment of a substantive headteacher is key to the school's ongoing success and are working closely with the local authority to ensure that this process is completed in an efficient and timely manner.

Recent mobility in teaching and support staff has been handled well. Middle leaders are enjoying playing more of a role in improving classroom practice. The regular non-contact time you have introduced to their timetables has created the capacity required for them to become more effective in their roles.

Teachers welcome the changes you have made. These include allowing them more freedom to plan and deliver learning, particularly in English and mathematics. Your expectation is that teachers will give more focused attention to the needs of individuals or small groups of pupils, including the most able. This approach is already making a difference, although there are still inconsistencies in the level of

challenge provided for most-able pupils in some classrooms.

Classrooms are happy and productive places. It is obvious that pupils enjoy coming to school and that the curriculum meets their needs well. One pupil told me that she enjoys lessons because: 'Teachers make learning exciting,' and, 'we don't do the same every day, you know?'

Our visit to Reception gave me a good insight into the quality of provision there. It is clear that staff know children well. Phonics provision is particularly strong. I was very impressed with the engagement of children outside the classroom as they practised forming letters in the air with their 'magic wands'. This was clearly fun. However, wands gave way to chalk, and the learning moved on as children started to practise writing, sounding out different letters with great enthusiasm.

Pupils behaved exceptionally well during the inspection. They are keen to learn and really do relish challenge when it is offered. I was particularly struck by how articulate many of the older pupils are. We witnessed a number of examples of pupils confidently explaining the reasoning behind their answers, or justifying their opinions to others. Having heard your worry that too many pupils are at risk of becoming passive learners, it is clear to me your drive to ensure this does not happen is paying off.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors recognised the many strengths of the school, including the ability of school leaders to track pupils' progress, and the exceptional care, support and guidance offered to pupils by staff. They also identified the need for pupils to develop greater independence as learners, and for staff to share best practice in assessing pupils' progress across the school. Leaders have addressed these matters effectively. Pupils display a thirst for learning and understand how to be successful learners. New systems to assess progress and identify gaps in learning have been strengthened and are used consistently by staff to plan next steps in learning.

Since the last inspection, school leaders have continued the important process of self-evaluation in order to identify the key priorities to improve the school. Despite your relatively short period as headteacher, you were able to explain clearly the school's many strengths, as well as the areas that need to be developed. These include ensuring that levels of challenge provided for most-able pupils are consistently high enough, and that pupils make better progress in reading and mathematics as they move through key stage 2.

Safeguarding is effective.

Arrangements to ensure that pupils are safe are robust. Policies, procedures and systems are fit for purpose and day-to-day routines are sound. Pre-employment checks to ensure the suitability of staff and other statutory requirements are fully in place. Staff and governors have attended appropriate training.

The school's culture to ensure that pupils are safe is well developed. Staff, including

non-teaching support staff, were able to explain why they feel children at the school are safe and understand what to do if they have concerns. All parents who talked to me expressed total confidence in procedures to ensure that their children are safe in school. Pupils talked about the lack of bullying at the school, explaining they have many friends and that people are kind to each other. They also know what to do in the event of a fire, or who to talk to if they have concerns or worries.

Inspection findings

- You have quickly established your authority as the headteacher. The changes you have put in place since taking up your position are well thought through. There are clear indications that they are already having a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Middle leaders are playing more of a part in developing the school. They are very committed and are supporting you well in making the necessary changes to improve the school.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. They understand that they come to school to learn and they enjoy the way teachers vary the way they deliver learning, both inside and outside the classroom.
- The school's curriculum meets the needs of its pupils well. Links to real life are strong and underpin much of what is taught. A wide range of extra-curricular activities enrich learning, including residential visits and sports and activity clubs.
- Leaders and governors ensure that pupils' social and emotional well-being is given a high degree of importance. As a result, pupils are confident and have a positive attitude to all aspects of life at school.
- Children get a good start to their school life in the Reception Year. Staff cater for their individual needs very well. Most children make very good progress and are fully prepared for their move to Year 1 when it comes.
- Pupils make good progress in key stage 1. By the end of Year 2, standards in reading, writing and mathematics compare favourably with those seen nationally. This includes pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The school's phonics provision is a strength. This was evident when I listened to pupils read. Least-able readers successfully used their phonics knowledge to overcome their difficulties, while more confident readers read fluently and with enthusiasm. Tellingly, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected level in phonics screening checks is well above national averages in both Years 1 and 2.
- In the recent past, pupils did not make as much progress in key stage 2 as school leaders had hoped for. This was particularly the case in reading and mathematics, with most-able pupils, including most-able pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, not making the progress expected of them. You are acutely aware of this and are taking the necessary action to rectify the problem.
- Most of the very small number of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are currently making good progress as they move through the school. This is especially the case in key stage 1. Governors monitor this vulnerable group with

keen interest.

- The majority of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their different starting points. Teachers and support staff ensure that they receive the right balance of support and challenge in and out of classrooms. In doing so, they provide for pupils' individual needs well.
- Pupils behave well at Newlands. They are polite to adults and to each other. Poor behaviour is frowned upon by pupils themselves. During my discussions with pupils they told me that disruptions to learning are rare, and that Year 6 buddies are always there to remind them if they break the playground rules.
- The governing body carries out its statutory duties increasingly well. Governors know their roles are strategic in nature, but are keen to gain better insight into the day-to-day running of the school. Recent work in partnership with the local authority is helping them understand more clearly how to do this appropriately.
- The local authority has recently increased its support for the school. Governors and school leaders are benefiting from useful guidance and advice in order to further improve provision, and facilitate the appointment of a substantive headteacher. This level of support will continue for the foreseeable future.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils make more progress in reading and mathematics as they move through key stage 2
- the level of challenge offered to most-able pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, increases and becomes more consistent across the school.

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

Clive Close
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Throughout the inspection I focused on the safety and behaviour of pupils, as well as the progress pupils make in key stage 2, the quality of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and the progress of most-able and disadvantaged pupils. I met with you; middle leaders; the chair of the

governing body, accompanied by two other governors; pupils; support staff; and parents. I held telephone conversations with representatives of the local authority. You accompanied me on visits to classrooms, during which I talked to pupils and assessed the quality of their work. I also listened to pupils read. I observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms and around the school. I talked to parents at the beginning of the school day and took into account 60 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as 57 free text responses. I scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies, minutes of meetings, records of visits to the school by the local authority, and pupil progress information.