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Mr Paul Mason
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Mason

Short inspection of Southill Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 April 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There has been significant staff turnover since the last inspection, including your own appointment and that of your deputy. There have also been changes to the governing body. You and your governors have successfully re-energised the staff team to focus sharply on improving teaching. Leaders and governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and are taking effective action to bring about rapid improvement where it is needed. There is a strong team feel in the school. Staff pull together to share ideas and expertise to improve teaching so that it meets the differing needs of pupils in all year groups.

The areas identified as requiring improvement at the last inspection have been tackled effectively. You have improved procedures for checking pupils' work to ensure that they receive good-quality feedback about how to improve. Pupils use this guidance well to develop their learning further. You have ensured that teachers assess the quality of pupils' work accurately and use this information well to plan lessons that engage pupils in their learning. As a result, they are making good progress this year. Extra support given to pupils is carefully monitored to make sure that it is making a difference to their learning. It is well targeted and successful in helping pupils to plug gaps in their learning, or to catch up quickly.

There were many positive comments from parents about the school: 'A lovely school that feels like a family' and 'My child looks forward to going to school every day' were typical of those received. A very large majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and those spoken to during the inspection, reported that their children feel well cared for in school. Pupils confirmed this and said that they enjoy their lessons and being with their friends. Most parents also feel that their children are making good progress because they are taught well. They express confidence in leaders and governors who keep them well informed. However, a few parents communicated their anxiety about the responses they receive when raising issues or asking questions. You and your governors are currently in the process of considering how communication with parents can be improved, including how best to respond to parental concerns.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, your governors and the staff are committed to keeping pupils safe. Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. Procedures for recruiting and vetting new staff and other adults who help in school are robust. This ensures that pupils are looked after well and are safe in school. Staff are vigilant and very clear about what action to take if they have a concern about a pupil. You take timely action and work closely with outside agencies to provide pupils and their families with the support and guidance they may need. The lead safeguarding governor makes regular checks to ensure that the school's systems and procedures are working well.

Most parents who responded online, or who were spoken to during the inspection, report that their children feel safe in school. Pupils spoken to confirm this and express their confidence in talking to an adult if they are worried about something. They know how to keep themselves safe, including when using modern technologies. Pupils also report that behaviour is typically good with very little 'falling out'. They play amicably together during playtimes and work together well as 'learning buddies' during lessons. A small minority of pupils at the school present very challenging behaviour. Through a personalised approach to managing their behaviour, you have secured some notable successes with these pupils.

Inspection findings

- We agreed that my first line of enquiry would be to check that the improvement evident in children's learning in the Reception class is continuing. Your deputy headteacher leads this key stage and you have supported her in establishing a culture of high expectations of what children can achieve. She leads a strong, skilled team that makes very good use of assessment information to plan activities that take children's learning forward quickly. Stories are frequently used to capture children's imagination. For example, once familiar with the story of 'The hungry caterpillar', children were challenged to make their own book. Their rewriting of the story supported their understanding of how stories are structured, allowed them to practise their skills in forming letters and spelling words correctly, and consolidated their knowledge of the days of the week.

Linked activities, such as making fruit kebabs, supported their understanding of where different fruits come from and how to live a healthy lifestyle. They also explored mathematical patterns as they organised the fruit pieces in a specific and repeated order on a skewer.

- Leaders have promoted close working partnerships with local pre-schools and parents so children are confident when they start school. Relationships in the early years are supportive but challenge children to think for themselves. Staff provide sensitive guidance and encouragement which ensure that children keep trying. Children are very attentive, behave well and enjoy being with their classmates. The wide variety of experiences and the effective teaching of the early skills of reading, writing and mathematics prepare children well for their work in Year 1.
- The next line of enquiry we pursued was to unpick the reasons for the significant decline in Year 6 writing results in 2016, including why boys did not do as well as girls. Staffing changes through the school have resulted in inconsistencies in teaching over time. Some pupils, often boys, lack the motivation to write. Additionally, teachers' assessment of pupils' writing has not always been accurate due to an uncertainty about the expectations for pupils' knowledge and skills in each year group. Consequently, some pupils did not make the progress they required to achieve the expected standard at the end of Year 6.
- Following the 2016 results, leaders acted quickly to carry out a thorough review and to implement a sharply focused plan for improvement. Leaders and governors rigorously monitor the impact of the actions taken. Successes of particular note are teachers' raised expectations of what pupils can achieve, the frequency and accuracy of assessment, and the good-quality feedback pupils receive on how to improve their work. These improvements have secured good pupil progress this year. There is an increase in the number of pupils in all year groups who are working at or above the standard expected compared with the same point last year.
- Leaders have supported teachers in their planning of writing activities to ensure that pupils find lessons interesting. This is helping to engage boys so they can enjoy writing and achieve as well as girls. For example in Year 5, pupils' writing tasks are currently linked to the 'Harry Potter' books. I saw boys and girls fully focused on writing lively and engaging descriptions of magical creatures, and their factsheets about the dragons that appear in the books were detailed and informative. You have ensured that pupils are challenged to spell words correctly and to use increasingly varied vocabulary and punctuation to enliven their work. From similar starting points, boys and girls are making equitable progress this year. Pupils told me that they enjoy writing and this is evident in the improving standard of their work. Pupils write for a range of purposes including letters, play scripts and reports, but their writing in other subjects is limited largely to history and science.
- Finally, we looked at whether teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are high enough in writing and mathematics. In both subjects, expectations have been significantly raised this year with challenging targets set for all year groups. You have insisted that there is a clear focus on making best use of

accurate assessment to inform planning which challenges pupils of all abilities in all year groups. In mathematics, the sharp focus on developing pupils' thinking and reasoning skills is helping them to make good progress. Although there remain some inconsistencies, the actions you have taken have secured a marked improvement in the teaching of writing and mathematics. Consequently, pupils are making much faster progress this year. You recognise, however, that there is more to do to increase further the numbers of pupils working at both the expected and high standards.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- teaching in Years 1 to 6 continues to improve so that more pupils reach the expected or greater depth standards in writing and mathematics
- pupils are given more opportunities to develop their writing skills in other subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Alison Cogher
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your deputy headteacher to discuss the school's self-evaluation and improvements since the last inspection. Together, we visited all the classes to observe pupils' learning. I spoke to pupils during lessons and at lunchtime. I spoke to parents at the start of the school day and took account of the 115 responses to Parent View, together with the 96 written responses received. I also considered 26 staff questionnaire responses. I looked at the school's safeguarding records and your recruitment and vetting procedures. I met with three governors, including the chair of the governing body, and considered the effectiveness of the school's learning improvement plan. We looked at a sample of books from all classes and your most up-to-date assessment information regarding pupils' progress.

Following the conclusion of this inspection, a complaint was received by Ofsted. While Ofsted does not investigate individual complaints of this nature, it has been referred to the relevant department within the local authority.