

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr Keith Mansell
Headteacher
Minehead First School
Townsend Road
Minehead
Somerset
TA24 5RG

Dear Mr Mansell

Short inspection of Minehead First School

Following my visit to the school on 3 November 2015, 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 March 2012.

This school continues to be good.

You and the school's leadership team have maintained the good quality of education provided by the school since the last inspection.

You are highly ambitious for the pupils, staff and parents at Minehead First School. Your strong commitment and passion for improving the quality of education for all shines through. You and the leadership team have established a very welcoming and caring culture which pupils report is 'friendly, happy and enjoyable'. Despite changes in leadership and governance, the quality of education remains good. The strong leadership demonstrated by you, governors and staff illustrates the school's collective capacity for further improvements.

The governing body is making an effective contribution to the overall leadership of the school. Minutes of its meetings illustrate a detailed understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for development. Governors are ambitious for the school and are highly committed to it. Weekly meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body enable you to share what is working well and focus on your current priorities. Governors' frequent visits to the school enable them to check on the impact of actions identified in the school development plan. Each governor has an area of responsibility identified in the plan on which they report back to the full governing body once a month. As a result, all governors hold a detailed understanding of the

impact of leaders' actions. For example, they are aware of the positive difference that class assemblies are having in engaging more parents in the life of the school.

The last inspection report identified the need to improve pupils' basic skills. When they join the school pupils have a lot of ground to make up in order to reach the standards expected. Consequently, their good progress is not fully reflected in the results of the national assessments at the end of Key Stage 1. By the end of Year 2, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is below average but the attainment gap is closing quickly thanks to the good progress they are making. Pupils' progress continues to accelerate so that by the time pupils leave school at the end of Year 4 their attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is broadly average. This represents good academic achievement from their low starting points.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school is rigorous in implementing its safeguarding policies and procedures. All staff know individual pupils and their needs exceptionally well. Staff act as role models for pupils in the way they talk, act and behave towards each other. Leaders and staff follow up diligently all concerns to ensure vulnerable pupils and their families receive the support they need. The school's records are thorough and show an emphasis on ensuring all issues are fully resolved. The positive culture of keeping all pupils safe is illustrated by pupils' strong ability to say what it means to feel safe. They reported, 'It's a community, we feel part of it. We're comfortable here, looked after and cared for... people look out for you. We are taught about safety in lessons. The school is a happy place but we'd know who to turn to if we needed to.'

You, the business manager and governors ensure all recruitment procedures and checks are rigorously carried out. Training for all staff is frequent, detailed and up to date, which enables them to carry out their duties effectively. A recent external audit of your safeguarding arrangements reflected your ongoing commitment to this area of work and confirmed the high-quality practice you have in place. Recent training on the government's Prevent strategy provides you with a good understanding of how to keep pupils safe from the risk of exposure to extreme views.

While you have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are of high quality, you have concerns that referrals are not always acted upon swiftly enough when passed on to the appropriate authority. As a result, you deploy a parent support family adviser (PSFA) to monitor such situations constantly in order to ensure the safety of vulnerable pupils. The role of the PSFA is greatly appreciated by parents.

Inspection findings

- Children start school with emotional, social, speech and language skills well below those typical for their age. Your investment in a range of early support to

develop children's skills in these areas is working well. Specialist speech and language therapy and the development of precise social skills programmes by educational psychologists is helping children's early development. These strategies prepare children well for their academic learning later in the school.

- Your approach to early intervention is also improving pupils' punctuality and regular attendance at school. Staff and PSFAs play a crucial role in engaging with the parents of vulnerable pupils. Historically, pupils supported through the pupil premium were absent too frequently. This term, such absence has largely been eradicated. PSFAs work with families to encourage pupils to attend the 'early morning clubs' where active sports sessions are provided. This exciting range of activities is making a strong contribution to pupils' personal development and well-being. Planned breakfast club sessions help pupils to share experiences and broaden their interests with a strong emphasis on developing their determination to succeed, particularly when faced with work that appears difficult. Consequently, pupils are much better prepared for school and ready for learning. Pupils' good behaviour and enthusiasm play a strong part in the good progress they are making.
- Middle leaders play an active role in school developments. They use a range of indicators such as lesson observations, pupil and parental views, and 'book looks' to make well-informed judgements for their areas of responsibility. These internal indicators are regularly compared with other local schools to ensure the accuracy of judgements. Teachers are held to account for the progress that pupils make in their classes through termly one-to-one progress meetings. Middle leaders devise appropriate individual work plans to improve the quality of teaching where any areas of weakness are identified.
- Progress meetings are used to identify pupils who are at risk of falling behind and to provide immediate support. Teaching assistants play an important role in checking on the progress that pupils make. As soon as they catch up, pupils are returned to their class. Your investment in training for teaching assistants ensures that all pupils receive good-quality support. Consequently, teaching assistants feel valued and contribute well to school developments.
- Senior leaders and other staff have worked hard to devise a stimulating curriculum for pupils, which includes daily teaching of the basic skills. Literacy is taught well. All staff make good use of fiction books to motivate and engage pupils, especially boys. For example, when studying *Harry and the Bucketful of Dinosaurs*, boys' writing showed an increasingly sophisticated use of vocabulary to describe different dinosaur characters. Work in pupils' books and displays around the school confirm that most pupils are making good progress because they are writing more, and with greater confidence. However, some pupils struggle to write in sufficient detail which limits their opportunity to demonstrate the skills required to help them to progress at a faster rate. Pupils' core skills are being effectively developed through different subjects. For example, pupils in Year 1 experiment with rhyming words when studying autumn colours and pupils in Year 2 use Venn diagrams in mathematics to sort and classify types of leaves.

- You have tackled the engagement of boys' reading effectively through the promotion of interesting 'reading wall' displays in each classroom. The use of high-quality texts and discussion of interesting topics is enthusing boys and is prompting them to read and talk about their favourite books. On occasions, some tasks do not challenge the most-able pupils or deepen their understanding or mastery of reading.
- At times, the teaching of phonics (the sounds letters make) does not permeate through to every aspect of pupils' learning. Teachers sometimes do not pick up on learning points to deepen pupils' knowledge of a particular sound. During our joint learning walk, you were quick to identify these issues. We also identified effective practice where teachers watched, listened and checked accurately pupils' gains in their knowledge of individual sounds. You have rightly organised additional training and a full external review of the teaching of phonics as a result of the dip in results in the 2015 phonics check for Year 1 pupils.
- Teachers understand what is required of them and are enthusiastic in seeking advice and guidance in order to improve their teaching. You have been active in using the expertise from the Exmoor Federation of Schools to train staff for the new National Curriculum for mathematics. As a result, teachers are using effective prompts to develop pupils' mathematical reasoning skills. Occasionally, learning falters when planned activities 'jump' between topics and do not develop pupils' deeper understanding of mathematical concepts.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- improvements are made to the teaching of phonics for younger pupils so that more reach the standards expected by the end of Year 1
- teachers develop pupils' ability to write at length so more pupils can demonstrate the skills required which will help them to progress at a faster rate
- the more-able pupils are sufficiently challenged to deepen their understanding and mastery of concepts so that all can reach the highest levels.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Richard Light
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and the assistant headteacher, school business manager, staff, pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors. I also spoke with a representative of the local authority. I accompanied you and the assistant headteacher on visits to lessons and together we looked at work in pupils' books during these visits. I looked at the survey results from 'Parent View', Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents. I met with a group of pupils from Years 2, 3 and 4 to discuss their work and gain their views of the school. I evaluated the accuracy of your self-evaluation and reviewed a range of other documentation. I checked the effectiveness of your safeguarding arrangements and recruitment information.