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2 November 2016

Mrs Sue Tresilian
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Tresilian

Short inspection of Sythwood Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 6 October 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

Leaders have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have taken robust and effective action to address the low standards in 2015. You appointed a dynamic new leadership team, who, with the support of the executive headteacher, have brought about swift improvements in mathematics and writing. You have adeptly maintained the ethos of the school, as a caring and inclusive community. Parents especially appreciate the extra support and care given to those pupils who may struggle, with one parent reporting how well staff 'make so much extra effort to help my child grow'.

The new leadership team is ambitious and energetic. Leaders have high expectations and model these in the classroom and in their work with staff. You and your leaders have tackled weaker teaching and taken difficult decisions when necessary over the past 12 months so that teaching across the school is now more effective. More pupils than in the past are making good progress, especially in mathematics and writing. You have appointed staff carefully and adroitly because those staff new to the school have made an immediate impact on pupils' progress.

You are well supported by other leaders in the academy trust. There are useful links between schools to support staff training and moderation of pupils' work. Since last September in particular, the executive headteacher has provided further challenge to you and your governors, especially in raising expectations about the pace of change required. Leaders have sought expertise elsewhere, including from outside

your locality, so that they have introduced tried and tested practice. Consequently, pupils make more progress than before, both in mathematics and especially in writing. However, pupils have made less progress than you expected in reading.

Staff are overwhelmingly positive about the school and feel proud to work there. They report that leaders are supportive and help them achieve their best. They also say that the systems to reward performance are fair and include opportunities for further training and development. As a result, the large number of staff who are either new to the profession or recently qualified have chosen to remain in the school.

You have addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection effectively. You and your leaders have successfully embedded a more thorough system to assess pupils' work. Teachers use this system well and provide pupils with useful guidance on how to improve. Pupils make the most of this help and they make more progress as a result. The newly appointed year group leaders are making a significant difference to the standards in each year group. They work alongside teachers, supporting them with planning and moderation as well as modelling best practice. Consequently, the standard of teaching is improving across all key stages.

Safeguarding is effective.

There are suitable systems in place to check on the recruitment of staff. Governors exercise useful oversight of school practices and ensure that evaluating leaders' approach to safeguarding is a regular feature of their work. Those staff with additional responsibilities are well trained and knowledgeable about the local provision for vulnerable pupils. Consequently, these pupils are very well supported because leaders are scrupulous in checking that other agencies take the appropriate actions. Parents sought out the inspector to report how the school 'bent over backwards' to support their children and keep them safe.

Inspection findings

- You and your leaders know what the issues are and have the right actions in place to address them. Leaders are also well aware that some areas such as reading require especially urgent attention.
- You have set out a clear picture of what high-quality teaching should be, the 'Sythwood Way', which all staff understand and aim to follow. Leaders regularly check that teachers are meeting these expectations. However, leaders acknowledge that not all staff are consistently following the guidance given and meeting standards required, especially in the teaching of reading.
- Governors also recognised that they needed to 'up their game' after the 2015 results. As a result, they undertook additional training and sought support from the trust. Consequently, governors are increasingly providing more challenge to leaders with a range of suitable activities to check on standards throughout the year as well as checking that funding for disadvantaged pupils is used well.

- You and your leaders use the new assessment system very effectively. You have accurate and useful information to hand to review how much progress pupils make. As a result, leaders are now making improved use of this information to plan additional intervention for pupils in key stage 2 who need support to catch up.
- More pupils achieved the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics than the national average in 2016. Pupils made good progress in writing because leaders have established successful school-wide systems to raise standards from their previous low point.
- Fewer pupils than you expected reached or exceeded standards in 2016 in reading and as a result the progress that pupils made was below the national average. However, leaders have worked hard to address this so that current pupils are making better progress. Pupils enjoy reading and are enthusiastic about the changes that you have made to the library to refresh the stock of books.
- In 2016, most-able pupils' attainment in mathematics, reading and writing was broadly in line with the national average. There was also an increase in the number of current pupils exceeding expected standards in key stage 2. Evidence from books shows that the most able pupils are now frequently tackling more challenging work in their lessons as teachers grow in confidence in following the 'Sythwood Way'.
- In the past, disadvantaged pupils did not make as much progress as other pupils nationally. Current information shows that this is no longer the case, with disadvantaged pupils doing as well as, if not better than, others. More disadvantaged pupils achieved the expected standard in phonics in 2016 than the national average and more of the most able disadvantaged pupils are exceeding expected standards in Years 5 and 6.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making good progress from their starting points. Those pupils with a visual impairment are especially well integrated into the life of the school. Teachers and other adults work closely together to help these pupils succeed. However, a few pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities need further support to improve their reading.
- In 2016, at the end of key stage 1 more pupils achieved the expected standards than previously, especially those pupils who entered the school at the beginning of the Reception Year or those who can speak English confidently. In addition, in 2016 more pupils than the national average achieved the expected standards in phonics. The teaching of phonics and of reading in key stage 1 is a strength of the school, with specialist teaching that has been recognised nationally as especially strong. However, not all teachers have yet developed this level of expertise.
- The provision for children in the early years is increasingly effective. You have put the Nursery and the early years classrooms together so that there is now a more coherent and joined-up approach to giving these children the best possible start. Consequently, those children who join the Reception class from the Nursery do well and achieve better than their peers who join later.

However, a few of the pupils in the Reception Year continue to struggle to communicate and need additional support to access the curriculum.

- Approximately one in five of the pupils in each cohort joined the school as a casual admission and nearly half the pupils speak English as an additional language. Leaders have a wide range of systems in place to support these pupils so that by the time they leave school they are well prepared for the next stage of education. However, these pupils struggle to reach expected standards by the end of key stage 1 and are not catching up quickly enough in the first instance.
- Pupils talk excitedly about the curriculum. They enjoy learning about the world around them, they can confidently explain what the difference between right and wrong is as and they are tolerant of other people who may think differently to them.
- In the past, some pupils did not attend well and the school's attendance was below the national average. Over the last year, leaders have taken prompt action to address this so that in 2016 attendance overall is in line with the national average. There are also fewer pupils who are regularly absent than previously, although a small number who have special educational needs and/or disabilities continue to attend less well than expected.
- Pupils are enthusiastic about school and appreciate the opportunities they have to learn new things. They especially enjoy swimming weeks and other sporting activities. They work well together and try their best.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- further refine the school's approach to improve reading so that more pupils, especially those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, make strong progress to achieve well at the end of each key stage
- support pupils who are new to the school in key stage 1 who have English as an additional language to catch up more quickly by increasing the amount and quality of help that they receive
- further improve planning so that all staff are consistently meeting the expectations of leaders in relation to the teaching of reading
- improve the attendance of those few pupils who currently attend less well.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the Bourne Educational Trust and the director of children's services for Surrey County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Seamus Murphy
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

For this inspection, I focused on the quality of safeguarding, actions taken since the previous inspection, the progress of disadvantaged pupils, the quality of teaching of reading and writing, the progress of the most able and the impact of new leadership in the school. I visited the school for one day. I met with you, your leaders, staff and governors, as well as with the chief executive of the trust. The 69 responses to the staff survey were also considered. Policies around safeguarding, your own analyses of pupils' achievement and other documents were scrutinised. I visited all year groups to see teaching and learning. There were informal meetings with pupils, and I listened to Year 1 pupils read. I also looked at pupils' work in lessons with leaders, in particular English books from key stage 2. The 45 responses to Parent View were analysed, as well as taking into account the views of parents whom I spoke to informally at the end of the school day.