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Mr Jamie Stone  
Headteacher  
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Denbury  
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Devon  
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Dear Mr Stone

### **Short inspection of Denbury Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 18 January 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 April 2013.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

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

The school has gone through a turbulent time since the previous inspection. However, you have successfully led the school and managed the changes necessary to be a good school once again. Staffing changes had led to a drop in pupils' standards, especially for older pupils. A fall in pupil numbers resulted in a reduction of classes and changes to how year groups are now taught. In December 2015, the local authority identified weaknesses in leadership and management as well as in teaching. This left you facing many challenges but with little capacity to drive improvement. You and your governing body therefore wisely used the recommendations of the local authority review to implement change. As a result, you have halted the fall in standards and secured good teaching throughout the school. You wisely engaged the support of a national leader of education (NLE), a national leader of governance (NLG) as well as other external partners to help bring about the necessary changes. A further external review in November 2016 confirmed that the school had 'turned a corner' and outcomes for pupils were now improving.

Governors confirmed to me that they fully understand the school's strengths and areas for improvement because communication with you is strong. Their capacity to drive improvement has strengthened significantly. Through their regular

meetings, reports from you, as well as informal conversations with staff and parents, governors have developed a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement.

You have established strong, professional working relations with four other local schools in order to support and sustain the good work in the school. This has led to an increase in teachers' confidence as they benefit from working alongside other professionals to develop their subject knowledge and skills.

You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection. For example, teachers' targets are sharply focused on raising pupils' achievements. The performance of your teachers is regularly reviewed. You now ensure that there is an appropriate balance of school as well as personal improvement targets set for teachers. Those who spoke with me confirmed their professional development is taken seriously and reviewed regularly so that they feel well equipped to carry out their roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, there is strong and consistent evidence that pupils are in the habit of using teachers' written feedback to improve their work further.

The most recent data you shared with me on current pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics indicates that most pupils are making good progress towards achieving their end of year targets. Disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the most able are all tracked as discrete groups. This allows you to maintain a clear understanding of how well pupils are learning. It also highlights what needs to be done to support those pupils who might need to catch up or benefit from further challenge in order to achieve their best. You regularly provide your staff and governors with a summary of pupils' progress. Teachers use this information appropriately to help them plan the next steps in pupils' learning.

The school regularly monitors attendance data and can produce evidence that this is done for key groups with any patterns analysed and rigorously followed up. Historic low attendance (due mainly to the persistent absence of a few pupils) continues to be rigorously addressed. Pastoral support provided by the school is appreciated by parents and proving to be very effective. Current attendance data shows an improvement on last year's data and an improving trend over the past three years.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Pupils are safe in the school. A strong culture of safeguarding has been built around a secure knowledge of pupils' individual needs and any vulnerabilities they may demonstrate. Staff know the needs of pupils and their families well and are vigilant in spotting any evidence that a child may not be thriving. You and your staff have a very good knowledge of the pupils in your care whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable. Records show that the school is able to take appropriate action where necessary and works closely with external partners in order to help pupils to thrive as well as keep them safe. Parents who spoke with

the inspector agreed that their children were safe and well cared for while at school. For example, a typical comment written by one parent said, 'At Denbury they can grow up in a friendly, happy, safe and nurturing environment – we couldn't ask for anything more for them.' The single central register of checks that are made on the staff's backgrounds and their suitability to work with children follows the recommended procedure. However, there are one or two areas where compliance with regulatory requirements needs attention. For example, the inspection found areas where safeguarding records of staff were not completed accurately or in full. They do not compromise pupils' safety. These gaps were investigated and where possible rectified during the inspection. Overall records show staff and governors are well informed, appropriately trained and regularly updated on changes in safeguarding legislation.

### **Inspection findings**

- Communication is a strength within the school.
- Governors are well informed and use their skills and experience to hold the school much more effectively to account. To this end, they have worked closely with the NLG to review the way they carry out their duties. For example, they have undertaken a skills audit to ensure that their knowledge and experience is used to best effect in supporting you and carrying out their responsibilities. A restructuring of the governing body has resulted in a 'one committee' structure with link governors identified for key areas of work. For example, the link governor for special educational needs now meets regularly with the school's special educational needs coordinator to understand better how pupils' progress is monitored and to check the effectiveness of this work. Another governor who took an interest in reading visited the school and spent time observing with you how reading was being taught. Significantly, this governor came back again at a later date to review the progress being made and compared outcomes to previous data. This approach demonstrates thorough and effective governance when holding the school to account.
- Teachers and other adults know the pupils very well. They possess a secure understanding of individual pupils' learning needs. The pastoral care of pupils and their families is also a high priority of the school. The good communication promoted between home and school is much appreciated by the parents I spoke with. Comments taken from the online survey, Parent View, confirm that you and your staff are doing all you can to work effectively as a team for the benefit of all pupils. Many respondents said they could not speak highly enough of the school. For example, typical comments were: 'I can only speak highly of Denbury Primary School; my child is taught well and looked after by all the teaching staff. Denbury is a fantastic school.' 'The personal, social and emotional care has been excellent. With the right support my child has flourished more than our wildest dreams.' 'The children are taught to value each other, to help each other and respect each other. Mr Stone is well respected by parents and is always happy to speak to parents.'
- Throughout the lower part of the school, handwriting is being taught regularly. This is helping children to develop a mature and confident writing style. Good

handwriting and presentation of work is not as consistent for older pupils as it is lower down the school. In each classroom, pupils' progress and writing development are clearly displayed. Pupils spoke with enthusiasm about their work. For example, older pupils were able to explain confidently how they are being taught to analyse different genres of writing and to imitate authors' styles of writing.

- The youngest pupils make a very secure start to their education. Adults make very good use of the learning environment, indoors and outside, to promote pupils' enthusiasm for learning. Pupils are taught to read very effectively, which in turn enables them to develop secure writing skills. Pupils who spoke with me said they are happy to come to school and enjoy learning. They all agreed that behaviour incidents are dealt with sensitively and in a timely manner.
- The needs of disadvantaged pupils are well known and carefully provided for. The most recent data gathered on pupils' progress indicates that the difference between these pupils' attainment and that of other pupils is steadily diminishing. Data also indicates that most pupils in Year 6 are on track to achieve their end-of-year targets in writing.
- The work with your partner schools to moderate the standard and quality of pupils' work has further helped build teachers' confidence to evaluate pupils' work more precisely. Teaching staff confirm that there have been positive changes in the teaching of literacy. They are more confident now because the programme of work is very clear and they understand exactly what they need to do, especially in helping the most able pupils achieve the standards they are capable of reaching. Teachers believe they are now at a stage where they could adapt writing sequences more accurately to match the learning needs of individuals. This would allow pupils greater opportunities to write freely and at length.
- The accurate identification of weaknesses in teaching and leadership led to sharply focused programmes of work being introduced to strengthen leadership and the overall professionalism of staff. Work with external partners has been timely and effective. Staff are now being better trained and leaders have a clearer understanding of how to drive school improvement. The quality of teaching is steadily improving, especially in the key stage 2 classes. There is a steady and convincing picture of improvement in pupils' learning, progress and outcomes.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- older pupils achieve higher standards in their writing and can write freely for a wide range of audiences and at length
- the monitoring of safeguarding records is carried out regularly and in greater detail.

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

Yours sincerely

David Edwards  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met regularly with you throughout the day as part of a professional dialogue. I also met with representatives of the governing body, including the chair. I held meetings with teachers and spoke informally with other members of staff during the day. Together we undertook observations of learning in lessons. We spoke with pupils about their work and examined pupils' work, focusing on writing and presentation. Before the inspection, I examined a variety of documents made available by the school, including the school's website, published performance data and a summary of its self-evaluation. I spoke to parents at the start of the day and also took into account 30 responses to the online survey, Parent View, 21 pupil questionnaire responses and 10 replies to the staff survey.

The inspection focused on the following key lines of enquiry:

- How well has the school addressed the areas for improvement identified at the time of the previous report? These were:
  - how well teachers' feedback to pupils provides clear points for improvement
  - whether strengthened leadership and management ensures teachers' professional development targets are sharply focused on raising pupils' achievements
  - how well teachers' targets for professional development are linked with the school improvement plan
  - how well are disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the most able being supported?
- The development and progress of pupils' ability to write confidently and for a range of audiences
- What has the school done to address past attendance issues? How effective is the school in working with other agencies and partners to support families and pupils' attendance?
- How well is the school's senior leadership, including governors, demonstrating the capacity to drive improvement?
- Is safeguarding effective?