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31 January 2017

Mr Darren Troake  
Headteacher  
West Coker CofE VC Primary School  
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Dear Mr Troake

### **Short inspection of West Coker CofE VC Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 12 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 February 2013.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have created a strong ethos where the school's Christian values underpin all aspects of its practice. A harmonious environment exists in which children are happy, safe and secure. The growing sense of partnership among staff contributes strongly to the vision you set for the school.

Your arrival in September 2014 has brought a renewed focus on improving outcomes for pupils following many changes to staffing over the last 12 months. In your work, you are building on the strengths from the time of previous inspection well. Your drive to improve standards is supported by an effective governing body and recently appointed chair of governors. Governors have a clear understanding of both the needs of the school and how the school fits into the community as a whole. They share, support and challenge you to address the priorities you have identified as the areas the school needs to work on most, in order to improve the quality of education even further. These include a continued focus on the improvement of pupils' mathematics, phonics and the early years, and increasing the level of challenge for the most able pupils, especially in writing.

You have successfully addressed the issues identified at the previous inspection. Training and support for teachers is enabling pupils to move quickly into activities that are well matched to their abilities. Pupils are also devising their own ways of extending learning for themselves. Pupils are pleased with the effective feedback

that they receive from teachers. Your focus to improve writing and raise standards in phonics in the early years and Year 1 so that it impacts positively on reading and writing standards further up the school is proving successful. The presentation of written work in upper key stage 2 is testament to the impact of the teaching of writing skills. However, you recognise that pupils, including the most able, are not yet developing their writing skills in other curriculum areas well enough.

The majority of parents spoken to are very pleased with the quality of education and care their children receive. Parents of pupils who have recently arrived at West Coker Primary School speak of the welcome their children received and how smooth the transition has been. A few parents are less positive regarding the level of communication from the school, which you and governors recognise as an issue to address. Overall, it is clear that the school is at the centre of a learning community in which staff and parents work well together to improve the educational outcomes for pupils.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

A culture of strong safeguarding is evident across the school. Pupils feel safe and parents agree that their children are happy and well looked after. Records relating to safeguarding are fit for purpose, detailed and of high quality, reflecting the school's determination to keep pupils safe. Staff are vigilant and are clear about the procedures in place. Regular training and updates ensure that staff have a good awareness of a range of issues around child protection and radicalisation and of any problems or changes to legislation. Staff know children well. This, in turn, means that they are very well placed to spot concerns early to notice if a child's behaviour changes and whether this might indicate a deeper concern.

Pupils know how to keep safe when using the internet and have a secure understanding of the misuse of social media. They report that there is no bullying in school and are confident that if it did happen, staff would deal with it swiftly. Minor issues with the safeguarding policy on the school website, which you and the governors are aware of, are being amended.

### **Inspection findings**

- In the past, pupils have tended to perform better in reading and mathematics than in writing. This pattern was repeated in the recent 2016 national curriculum assessments at both key stage 1 and key stage 2. Work in pupils' books across a range of abilities, including the most able, shows that pupils are now making good progress in their writing skills. For example, pupils in Years 5 and 6 confidently write complex sentences for a range of purposes and use punctuation to improve meaning and convey imaginative thoughts. Actions to improve pupils' writing and mathematics skills has ensured that the achievement gap between boys and girls has closed. The most able pupils do not routinely apply their formal writing skills in other writing areas of the curriculum in order to extend their understanding further.

- Younger pupils' performance in writing has also improved. Year 2 pupils confidently use capital letters and full stops accurately. Many write sentences that ask questions or make statements with letters that are formed at the correct size and using spacing between words.
- Your restructuring of the teaching of phonics and early reading is proving effective. Teaching is now more rigorous. This is paying dividends, as was evident when the inspector listened to the Year 2 and 3 readers who had not previously passed the phonics screening check. Outcomes for pupils given extra support due to their low performance in the phonics screening check are also improving. These pupils demonstrate the ability to use their phonic knowledge confidently when decoding unknown or difficult words not seen previously. Pupils' reading levels in Year 2 have also improved, with over half of this cohort currently working at age-related expectations or above. School information and inspection evidence shows that Year 3 pupils are now making good progress in reading and this has a positive effect upon their writing.
- Over time, the early years provision has not prepared children well enough for work in Year 1. Last year, just over half of the children reached the standard expected to be ready for Year 1. Their achievement, and particularly that of boys, was weakest in reading, writing and all aspects of mathematics. The attainment of children in the early years last year was below that achieved by children nationally, though this was a small cohort. Current children are on track to achieve a good level of development in line with the national average. Children talk clearly about their learning and how they are developing key learning behaviours such as perseverance, or as they put it, 'not giving up'. Teaching assistants are providing effective support in nurturing children's early skills. However, turbulence in staffing has hampered the effectiveness of your plans to improve the opportunities for children to learn outdoors.
- In the early years, the topic-related role play area is used for child-initiated and guided learning. However, the choice of a range of activities, indoors and outdoors, that offer opportunities to develop the required knowledge, skills and attitudes for writing are restricted. You have identified the need to develop more activities for young children to develop their mark-making in preparation for writing and drawing. You are also aware that children's successes need to be shared more effectively with the parents.
- The governing body is reflective; it challenges the headteacher and supports the school well. Governors are developing their roles and responsibilities in providing strategic oversight and show a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They understand the nature of pupil premium funding and its impact, especially on pupils' social and emotional issues. Governors are aware of the need to improve the communication with parents, recognising the difficult time the school had been through. Governors have not been complacent and have undertaken an external review and a skills audit so that they are able to formally record visits in their desire for self-improvement. This coincides with action to amend the accuracy of documents on the school website.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the early years provision, especially the outdoors area, is developed further to improve the writing and language skills of the children
- the school extends the breadth of the writing curriculum beyond the formal skills to develop greater challenge for pupils, especially the most able
- governors use their planned review to develop their role of strategic oversight in order to bring about further school improvement, secure better communication with parents and ensure that the school website is compliant with statutory requirements.

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

Yours sincerely

Terry Mortimer  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, staff, parents at the start of the day and four members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. A telephone call was held with a representative of the local authority. There were not enough responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, to register. Learning was observed in all classrooms, jointly with you, and discussions held with pupils about their learning. Pupils' writing, mathematics work and English books were scrutinised. A wide range of documentation and information relating to your self-evaluation, school improvement planning, equalities, assessment, monitoring and evaluation, and safeguarding, was evaluated.

The key lines of enquiry during the short inspection day were:

- the impact of leaders and managers in developing achievement in key stage 1 and 2, especially for girls in writing and mathematics
- do leaders' actions to raise standards in early years and in phonics have a positive impact on raising standards in reading and writing in key stage 1 and 2?
- governors' actions to develop their roles to improve their performance and also to discharge their statutory duties correctly, including the compliance of the website
- how effectively the school keeps the pupils safe.