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Mrs Marcella Scoles
Headteacher
Steam Mills Primary School
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Dear Mrs Scoles

Short inspection of Steam Mills Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 17 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 January 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

As headteacher, you provide determined and intelligent leadership. With the support of your leadership team, you have made sure that the many strengths highlighted at the last inspection have been built upon. Together, you have tackled successfully the areas identified as being in need of further improvement at your previous inspection, including higher quality mathematics teaching and raising expectations across all subjects.

You have a clear vision for the school which is shared by your staff and governors to ensure that Steam Mills Primary School provides the best education for pupils. You have initiated new approaches and systems that effectively meet the demands of the new curriculum and the way in which pupils are now assessed. For example, further improvements were needed in mathematics and effective plans were put in place quickly, which have improved teaching and pupils' progress.

You have an accurate and realistic understanding of the school's current performance. Your action plans, including those drawn up by your middle leaders, set out clearly what needs to be improved further. You are ably supported in this work by your staff and governors. They are fully committed to implementing the changes to ensure that the school continues to improve.

The initiative to take on the management of the on-site pre-school has been a positive step, helping to better prepare children for starting school. Effective work to improve and develop the quality of teaching in the early years foundation stage has ensured that children achieve better outcomes at the end of the Reception Year. However, you and your leaders acknowledge that there is more to do in this respect.

You have taken appropriate steps to ensure that the new curriculum engages pupils' interests, particularly those of boys, and inspires their writing. A significant strength of the school is the clear and timely guidance teachers give pupils, enabling them to produce examples of high-quality writing both in English and other subjects. However, in some cases, pupils are not writing at sufficient length. This hampers their ability to extend their skills and reach the highest standards.

The school has a caring and friendly ethos. Leaders take pride in the school's commitment to becoming a 'thinking' school, helping all pupils to achieve high standards while enjoying their learning. This is what appeals to parents, who are delighted that their children attend this school. Pupils say that teachers make sure that everyone is very kind and respectful to each other, and that school is a happy, safe place. They talk enthusiastically about all the experiences that the school has to offer, such as the wide range of sporting activities, and this is why they are rarely late or absent from school.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your team have created a strong culture for safeguarding within the school. You all get to know the families of children who attend Steam Mills Primary School very well and keep a close eye on their welfare, especially any whose circumstances make them vulnerable. You and the governors ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of good quality. Staff are well trained and you check on their understanding of the latest government guidelines with regular 'quizzes'. Any concerns are immediately followed up by you in your role as designated child protection lead. You are tenacious in your monitoring and resolving of any concerns. You work effectively with outside agencies to reduce risk to pupils and to keep them safe.

You and your governors understand how to recruit safely. Stringent procedures ensure that staff are carefully vetted prior to employment. Governors carry out regular checks on health and safety, focusing on making the school as safe as possible. They respond quickly to any suggestions to make improvements, such as the request from pupils to raise the height of the fence to increase security. Parents firmly hold the view that their children are kept safe at all times and they know that they can speak to you or your teachers if anything, no matter how small, worries them or their children.

Inspection findings

- Outcomes in the Reception Year have improved year on year and are now broadly in line with the national average. More children are currently on target to meet the early learning goals than previously. This is a result of the increased emphasis on developing children's writing and mathematical skills. The 'tricky, trickier, trickiest' challenges ensure that children, including the most able, are being stretched every day in their learning. You have also strengthened the provision for developing children's physical skills. Initiatives such as daily running and 'dough disco' are proving to be effective yet fun ways of building children's physical fitness and dexterity. The strong focus on teaching children to speak clearly and listen carefully is having a good impact on the language skills of the youngest children in the Nursery class. However, you and your leaders are aware that there is more to be done to ensure that children make the best possible progress.
- There is no longer a difference in the reading ability of those who are disadvantaged and those who are not. This is because you have developed better strategies to encourage regular reading at home. The new programme to teach phonics and an attractive range of new reading resources have also helped to improve children's reading skills. Pupils use their knowledge of phonics confidently to tackle unknown words. They use good expression and demonstrate a detailed understanding of what they read. This indicates that improvements to the teaching of phonics are having a good impact.
- Results in mathematics in 2016 at the end of key stage 2 improved and are now in line with the national average. Not satisfied with this, you have taken swift action to introduce higher levels of challenge and stretching of thinking. The 'do it, twist it, solve it' approach has strengthened pupils' skills in reasoning and deepened their understanding of mathematical concepts. Your assessment data indicates that pupils are on track to achieve highly at the end of the year. Work in pupils' books confirms this.
- New themes in the curriculum are inspiring boys to achieve as well as girls. Pupils appreciate the guidance that teachers give them in revising and improving their work. Standards of handwriting and presentation are good. In some subjects, such as science and geography, there were impressive examples of some pupils extending their writing and achieving highly. However, this is not always the case.
- The leader for special educational needs has implemented effective systems for supporting pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Her commendable work with external agencies and other specialists has ensured that pupils' needs are identified precisely and plans are tightly focused. Parents are involved every step of the way and make regular contributions to pupils' individual plans. Well-trained staff demonstrate good skills in providing the right levels of support and challenge in small-group sessions and to individuals. As a result, the school's work enables pupils to be successful in their learning, and integrated fully into school life.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- progress in the early years foundation stage continues to accelerate so that more children achieve highly and are well prepared for the start of Year 1
- the teaching of writing extends pupils' writing skills more consistently so that they achieve the highest possible standards.

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

Yours sincerely

Sandra Woodman
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and discussed the school's self-evaluation, information about the progress pupils are making and improvements since the last inspection.

We agreed the following key lines of enquiry: how well children achieve in the early years; the extent of the school's success in accelerating progress in mathematics, especially for the most able pupils; how well the curriculum had been strengthened to improve standards in boys' writing; and how well the school keeps pupils safe.

I held discussions with your middle leaders, the special educational needs leader, and three governors, and spoke with a representative from the local authority. I visited all classrooms with you and we looked at a range of work in mathematics and writing. I listened to some pupils read and talked to them about school life. I looked at a range of written evidence, including documents relating to safeguarding and attendance information. I took account of the views expressed by 37 parents who completed the online questionnaire and their written comments, and the views of the two members of staff and the eight pupils who returned a questionnaire.