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Mr Ian Cording
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Cording

Short inspection of Whitleigh Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 31 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. At the heart of this school is a strongly shared commitment to inclusion and equality of opportunity, underpinned by a vision of 'respect for all, learning for life'. All pupils, regardless of background, race, faith or disability are cared for and supported to achieve. Pupils spoke warmly of their 'friendly school', where discrimination or hurtful behaviour is very rare. Whitleigh is an orderly, purposeful and ambitious school, where staff believe that pupils should be helped to 'keep up', and not have to 'catch up'.

You and your leadership team are focused on continuous improvement. Strong practice is celebrated and shared, and partnerships with other schools help to identify where assessment, teaching and the curriculum can be improved. You make sure that decisions and actions are based on evidence and experience, and not on 'hunches' or 'fads'. At Whitleigh, policy is quickly turned into practice. Staff and leaders at all levels work hard to make sure pupils receive a consistently good quality of education.

Since the last inspection, leaders have successfully improved outcomes in reading and writing. For example, national test scores for pupils in Year 6 in 2016 placed the school in the top 25% of schools nationally for these subjects. However, you have rightly recognised that some other areas of the school's work need to improve further in order to match these high standards. For example, in the same set of

national tests, results in mathematics were lower than for reading and writing. You have also identified that the progress of boys in younger year groups, including in phonics and in the early years, needs to be improved. In addition, you have correctly judged that a larger proportion of children by the end of Reception Year ought to be ready for lessons in key stage 1. As a result, we agreed that this short inspection would focus on each of these aspects.

You are also working to develop the partnership with the secondary school that shares the same site. This partnership, which was formalised in June 2015, is a 'hard' federation where both schools share the same governing body. It has, however, resulted in some turbulence to governance arrangements for your school. We therefore agreed that the effectiveness of governance should also be a focus for this inspection.

Safeguarding is effective.

A culture of safeguarding, safety and welfare is paramount throughout the school. You have ensured that policy, practice and procedure meet all statutory requirements, including for the safe recruitment of staff and volunteers. Leaders, along with the governing body, make sure these arrangements are robust and are kept fully up to date. You have ensured that all staff understand their responsibilities for reporting concerns, which are carefully recorded and followed up rigorously. Where necessary, leaders work assiduously with external agencies to safeguard children's welfare. You have also made sure that all staff understand the government's 'Prevent' duty, intended to counter the risks of radicalisation. Your approach is both reasonable and proportionate, and takes careful account of the context of the school.

This is a caring school, where pupils are known as individuals. Parents' involvement and contribution to school life is welcomed and greatly valued. Pupils are helped to understand about the risks of dangerous or unsafe behaviour. They are knowledgeable about e-safety and cyber bullying, and are aware of the importance of road safety and healthy lifestyles. Attendance for all groups of pupils is rising, and there have not been any exclusions from school for many years. As in other aspects of school life, you have placed a great deal of importance on the benefits of partnerships to ensure pupils' safety, welfare and well-being.

Inspection findings

- Following disappointing results in mathematics in last year's key stage 2 national tests, you set about immediately understanding and tackling the reasons for this underachievement. The actions you have taken have led to a rapid improvement in pupils' reasoning skills, fluency in recall of number facts and relationships, and in their ability to think more deeply about the mathematics they are learning. You and the mathematics leader have worked hard to develop teaching and the curriculum in mathematics and have made sure there are close links between training and development, staff appraisal and the checks made on teaching quality.

- We visited a number of mathematics lessons to look at the quality of pupils' work and their enjoyment of learning. It is clear there have been impressive improvements in a short space of time. A higher proportion of pupils are now on track to meet expected standards by the end of Year 6. You have improved the reliability of assessment in mathematics, including by working in partnership with staff from other schools.
- An important ingredient in this improvement is an emphasis on pupils' mastery of key skills and understanding in mathematics. This means that adults are alert to pupils' errors and misconceptions and ensure that help is provided there and then, or very soon after the lesson has finished. In this way, feedback is prompt and targeted. As a consequence, it was noticeable in the mathematics books we looked at that teachers' marking was very often 'light touch' and only where needed.
- Provision in the early years is also improving well. Assessment information shows that boys are catching up with girls, and further improvement is expected in the overall proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the early years. Many children who attended the school's provision for two-year-olds went on to make accelerated progress by the time they finished Reception Year. The records of pupils' learning are also much improved and are being used to understand children's next steps in learning more clearly. These 'learning journals' provide a robust, accurate and very pleasing record of children's achievements.
- There is also a greater focus on what children will learn, including through play. Boys in particular are guided more successfully to activities that appeal to them and promote their learning. Boys are also being supported more effectively by staff, especially when taking part in writing tasks. The purpose of indoor and outdoor spaces is now much clearer, and staff are more proactive in their approach to developing children's speaking and listening skills.
- There are similar improvements in the quality of phonics teaching in key stage 1 and in the early years, particularly for boys. Teaching has been reorganised as a result of your accurate diagnosis of weaknesses in the previous approach. Teachers now have greater accountability for pupils' progress, and have direct responsibility for phonics teaching input. Your expectations are appropriately ambitious – as we saw when children in the early years were practising their cursive script.
- The impact of these changes to phonics teaching can be seen in improvements in proportions of pupils on track to meet the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check. In fact, more than twice the proportion of children, including boys, are on track to reach this standard than in the corresponding cohort in the previous year. The differences in achievement between boys and girls in phonics have narrowed considerably. Throughout the school, pupils are enthused by and enjoy their reading.
- The governing body has undergone significant change over the last 18 months, including a complete change in its membership. As a result, many governors are in the process of developing their skills, knowledge and experience. There

remains an ongoing challenge to recruit to vacancies on the governing body.

- This has limited governors' capacity to provide support and challenge to you and your leadership team. Nevertheless, governors have ensured that they have maintained a keen eye on matters related to safeguarding, including checking that statutory aspects, such as those relating to safe recruitment, are robust. They are also mindful of the welfare of the wider school community, such as the well-being of school staff.
- The governing body provides adequate levels of scrutiny for the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. They are helped to understand the life of the school through opportunities such as 'governor days'. However, governors are not yet given all the information they need to oversee the strategic use of additional funding, such as the pupil premium. Although this funding is, in general, used wisely, governors are not yet able to understand clearly the impact of specific decisions about the allocation of pupil premium funding.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- Raise achievement in mathematics by fully establishing recent improvements to the quality of teaching and the curriculum.
- Further improve boys' achievement, including in the early years, by:
 - continuing to use assessment information to help move on children's learning quicker
 - further developing approaches to learning that appeal to boys
 - building on the existing improvements to the quality of phonics teaching.
- Strengthen the work of the governing body by:
 - recruiting successfully to the remaining vacancies
 - making sure that governors have the skills and information they need to challenge and support school leaders more effectively.

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

Yours sincerely

Lee Northern
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your deputy headteacher and with leaders responsible for mathematics and for the early years. I looked at assessment information for children in the early years, for mathematics and for phonics, and reviewed your school self-evaluation summary. I scrutinised safeguarding records and discussed with you a wide range of matters related to safeguarding and pupils' safety and welfare, including staff recruitment and vetting procedures. Together, we visited the early years, phonics and mathematics lessons, where we also looked at examples of pupils' work. I held a telephone discussion with the interim chair of the governing body and met with a small group of staff. I scrutinised recent minutes of meetings of the governing body. I also met with a group of 13 children from Years 2, 4, 5 and 6 to hear their views about their experiences of school. I considered the responses made by parents to Parent View, and the 33 responses received to an online survey of staff views.

The key lines of enquiry tested on the short inspection day were:

- pupils' learning and progress in mathematics, particularly in key stage 2
- boys' achievement, particularly in the early years and in their understanding and use of their phonics knowledge
- leadership and outcomes in the early years
- the effectiveness of support and challenge provided by governors
- the effectiveness of safeguarding.