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Dear Mr Gibson

Short inspection of Ashchurch Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 March 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 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Over the years you have been in post, you have developed a strong and highly competent team of staff. This is because you have used your expertise and experience to recruit successfully and nurture the talent of your staff. You strongly believe that leadership is strengthened when exercised by different people. As a result, you push ambitious staff who are keen to develop their own ideas to grab opportunities when they arise. You nurture the enthusiasm of staff and prompt them to use their initiative. In this way, they are able to lead on aspects of the school's work.

Although the school continues to be successful in many ways, you have not allowed complacency to creep in. You readily acknowledge that there is always room for improvement and look to keep building on the school's strengths.

The close partnerships you share with the deputy headteacher and the governing body have assisted the smooth, stable running of the school. Effective communication characterises these relationships so that everyone has a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Consequently, the work of senior leaders and governors is purposeful and consistent. Governors take their responsibilities seriously. They bring a range of different skills and experience to bear on their work. It is important to governors that they fulfil the 'critical friend' role, and provide both appropriate support and effective challenge to senior leaders. This effective relationship, developed over many years, has helped the school to

secure consistently strong outcomes for its pupils over time. Although governors use performance information to hold you to account, its use could be refined further. This would enable governors to ask even more searching questions about the performance of different groups of pupils.

You have successfully tackled various areas for improvement raised at the last inspection, such as improving the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in key stage 2. For example, you have introduced smaller teaching groups and re-structured the timetable to enhance pupils' learning. You also lead by example, along with the deputy headteacher, by teaching targeted groups yourselves. Well-qualified and experienced teaching assistants also provide strong support to pupils.

These changes complement teachers' strong and improving practice, and the exciting curriculum which promotes creative, experiential learning. Furthermore, staff feel confident using the school assessment system, which is used well to monitor pupils' progress and assist those pupils who fall behind. Pupils enjoy participating in, and taking responsibility for, their learning. At key stage 2, the work in pupils' books shows that they are given many opportunities to write at length for different purposes and audiences. Consequently, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment continues to improve in the school.

Extending pupils' understanding of cultural diversity was also an area for improvement from the last inspection. Since this time, pupils from a wider range of cultural backgrounds have joined the school. Pupils are tolerant and respectful of each other, regardless of background. Some of the pupils who spoke to me showed their awareness of current world events and willingly shared their opinions.

Your leadership has been the driving force that has helped shape the school's identity. It has also promoted a school culture underpinned by values such as tolerance and mutual support. It is expected in your school that everyone supports everyone else, both staff and pupils. The staff are close-knit and help each other to develop. Pupils also feel a responsibility to look out for each other. One pupil who spoke to me said that there was no bullying because 'we're all friends with each other'. Staff also have high expectations of pupils, so that they are encouraged to do their best and rise to the challenge of thinking harder. In your words, 'Every child has the capacity to be amazing.'

Improvements to teaching, learning and assessment, alongside pupils' good behaviour and the culture you have fostered in school, contribute to pupils' high achievement. The achievement of pupils who left the school in 2016 was in the top 10% of schools in reading. It was also above average in mathematics. Pupils achieved in line with the national average for writing. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for secondary school by the time they leave in Year 6. This is not only because of their high achievement, but also because of the wider opportunities and experiences they receive during their time at the school. This view is supported by parents. All the parents who responded to the Parent View online survey would recommend the school. One parent commented, 'I have nothing but praise for all at Ashchurch.'

At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the key lines of enquiry to be considered during the day. These included establishing the effectiveness of actions taken to improve achievement of the most able pupils at key stage 2. We also considered the effectiveness of actions to ensure that children make the progress they are capable of in the early years. Furthermore, we considered to what extent absence is being reduced for different groups of pupils and whether safeguarding is effective. These lines of enquiry are considered below under 'Safeguarding' and 'Inspection findings'.

Safeguarding is effective.

The deputy headteacher and yourself, as designated safeguarding lead and deputy lead respectively, have an in-depth understanding of any safeguarding concerns. This is because you know all the pupils in the school and their families well. You ensure that staff pass on their concerns to you and share information freely when appropriate. Records of concerns, containing staff observations, key details and dated descriptions of actions taken, enable you to track cases closely. As a result, you are able to take further action, sometimes in partnership with other agencies, to ensure that children are kept safe. When support is not as timely or effective as it should be from external agencies, you do not settle for this. You are persistent and determined in your efforts to secure whatever support is necessary for the children in your care.

Staff have been appropriately trained in child protection, including the 'Prevent' strategy, which addresses the government's duty to tackle extremism and radicalisation. The checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children are complete and up to date. Staff and governors responsible for recruitment have also received training to ensure that new staff joining the school meet suitability requirements.

Pupils who spoke to me reported that they feel very safe in school. This is, in part, because they feel that site security is appropriate. It is also because they feel well looked after by staff and comfortable in each other's company. One pupil stated, 'I feel safe around the teachers because they wouldn't let anything happen to us.' All parents who responded to the Parent View survey agreed that their child is safe in school. One parent said of her daughter's experience, 'The school always provides a safe working and playing environment. I have never had any issues with her safety during her time there.'

Inspection findings

- Leaders and staff are aware of pupils, or groups of pupils, who fall behind and need to catch up at key stage 2. They use monitoring information to help determine the action that needs to be taken to help pupils catch up. Teachers routinely provide different tasks to pupils that match their abilities, yet stretch them to improve. Teaching assistants are deployed well to assist groups of pupils or individuals, both inside and outside of the classroom. They use their expertise

to ask questions of pupils that encourage them to think without giving them the answers.

- The most able pupils in key stage 2, including those who are disadvantaged, are challenged to extend their thinking in a variety of ways. For example, pupils receive extension tasks in some subjects once they have completed their work. The feedback provided by teachers challenges pupils to confront their mistakes, as well as recognise where they have done well. Pupils value this interaction with their teachers because it encourages them to wrestle with tricky ideas and concepts. In English, one Year 6 pupil who had written about a non-fiction text, was asked, 'what did the journalist want to achieve?' Questions such as these help pupils to consider texts more thoughtfully. In mathematics, pupils are required to articulate their reasoning and justify their answers. As a result, their skills improve, and this shows in the increasing sophistication of pupils' work over time.
- The latest assessment information indicates that pupils of different abilities, including the most able, are making strong progress. This is supported by the work in pupils' books. Pupils report that they feel challenged. One pupil said to me, 'In maths I particularly enjoy being challenged.' Pupils agree that the work they are set suits their academic level.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported by teachers and teaching assistants to make good progress. Their work shows that teachers provide appropriate tasks and extra 'scaffolding' to assist pupils in their writing when necessary. These pupils make good use of additional resources, such as the new information technology equipment that teachers use. One parent, who responded to the Parent View survey, was complimentary about support. She commented that her daughter, who experiences difficulties in her learning, 'is showing great progress because of the support she receives from her teachers.'
- Leaders have carefully analysed the reasons for underachievement in early years in 2016. Consequently, they have used this information to help ensure that current children in Reception make stronger progress. Actions have included monitoring progress more closely, developing children's independent writing and working more closely with parents.
- The early years teacher has a good understanding of children's needs because of her confident and accurate use of assessment. She also involves parents in the assessment process so that they have an active role in their child's learning. Ongoing progress is now being monitored more regularly. Consequently, the early years teacher is clear about the progress children are making. This assessment information is used by staff to target the weaker areas of some children's development and help them to catch up.
- Children have a very positive introduction to school when they join in Reception. The teacher in early years plans interesting activities that develop the full range of pupils' skills. Both inside the classroom and in the outdoors area, children are able to feed their imaginations and develop skills at the same time. During one observed lesson, children were visibly excited as they participated in activities stemming from the theme of dinosaurs. For example, some children enjoyed

developing their manual dexterity by using tongs to remove toy dinosaurs from a pit full of jelly!

- Since the last inspection, leaders have taken extra steps to improve attendance. They work closely with parents to establish good relationships, and help them to realise the importance of good attendance. Pupils are rewarded for good attendance. For example, pupils compete with each other to win 'Sam' (School Attendance Matters), a toy dog. The school's special needs coordinator, in the absence of a county education welfare officer, also works with select families to improve attendance. As a result, overall attendance is broadly in line with the national average and has been so over time. However, there is inconsistency between year groups. The attendance of Year 4 pupils is lower than that of other year groups. Despite the efforts of the school in working with families, there are still a very few cases of persistent absenteeism. These have a notable effect on attendance figures because of the small size of the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- governors use performance information to ask even more searching questions about the progress of different groups of pupils
- leaders continue to take action to improve the attendance of persistent absentees, particularly in Year 4.

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

Steve Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spoke to you, the deputy headteacher and the Reception teacher. I also spoke to pupils, representatives of the governing body and the school improvement adviser.

You and I made visits to lessons to observe pupils' attitudes to learning. I also scrutinised the work in pupils' books.

A range of documentary evidence was considered, which included the school's self-evaluation and information about performance management, current progress and attendance. I also considered the school improvement partner's most recent note of visit. Additionally, I scrutinised various safeguarding records, including those

relating to staff training and suitability to work with children.

I took account of 28 responses to the Parent View online survey, one response to the staff survey and one response to the pupil survey, issued as part of this inspection.