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Dear Mrs Lee-Gammage

Short inspection of Ashburton Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 14 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Despite a period of flux in teaching at the school, you have brought much-needed stability, renewed clarity and energy to the school. All at the school strive for the absolute best for the pupils. You have built an effective leadership team around you who share in your vision of what can be achieved. Together, you are steering the school on course towards the highest standards of teaching and pupils' achievement.

You have the respect of staff, pupils and parents alike because at the heart of your work is a clear vision of what you want Ashburton School to provide for its pupils, families and community. You support everyone to 'be your best' through a focus on rapid progress, the cultivation of 'pupils' personal characters' and the development of effective learning habits. Given the context of the community you serve, the curriculum serves pupils well. Ultimately, when pupils leave Ashburton School, they are well equipped – socially, emotionally and academically – to deal successfully with any future challenges they may face.

You recognise that achieving the best requires a culture of continuous improvement. In striving to reach this aim, you draw well on support, monitoring and guidance from South Dartmoor Multi-Academy Trust. Improvements start with an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school development plan uses this assessment of the school's performance to state what

needs to be done, and by when, for success to be achieved. This has resulted in a well-designed programme of staff training and facilitated open and honest dialogue between staff about what is working and what still needs to be done.

At the time of the last inspection, the school was asked to improve the quality of mathematics and to develop the curriculum to engage boys. Some inconsistency in teaching was also identified. These aspects continue to be addressed successfully, despite the changes to staffing at the school. Your leader for mathematics demonstrates a good understanding of provision across the school. Standards in mathematics are above average. Boys are far more engaged in their learning and the activities planned.

Teachers are benefiting from the primary sport premium (additional government funding to increase pupils' participation and competition in school sports) by working alongside specialist coaches to improve their practice. However, the current allocation of expenditure to fulfil the statutory requirements for swimming does not meet the spending criteria as set out by the Department for Education.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leadership team have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You ensure that policies and practice keep abreast of recent legislation and good practice. Staff attend update training regularly so that they are vigilant and mindful of the potential dangers to pupils. Your close links and proactive work with other professionals, such as social workers, ensure that referrals for more specialist support are managed well.

You invest significant time to supporting pupils' emotional development. Specific sessions for those pupils who may be vulnerable provide the time and space for a trusting relationship to develop between an adult and a child so that discussion is open and honest. Pupils quickly develop their own armoury of strategies for dealing with their feelings so that they can respond more appropriately to challenging situations in the future.

You have cultivated a strong sense of belonging in the school community. Parents, in particular, recognise you as someone who will always listen to their views and who is willing to act, when needed, to make a positive difference to their children's and their own lives. Teaching pupils about the values of respect, tolerance and open acceptance is one of the cornerstones of your work. You and your team have created a culture where difference, in whatever form it may take, is accepted and celebrated. This prepares pupils well for the realities of life beyond the school gates.

Inspection findings

- Together we agreed to focus on how well boys were performing in their writing. We also looked at how well disadvantaged pupils were developing their skills of spelling, grammar and punctuation. Another area we explored was how well pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are being supported

to achieve well. Finally we examined how well the 'Early Help' guidance is used to support disadvantaged pupils in the early years.

- The teaching of writing is technically accurate and precise. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to ensure that pupils understand grammar and punctuation conventions well. For example, in English, teachers know how pupils' report writing should progress as they become more skilled at this genre. Pupils' compositions have improved as a result of talking through their ideas before committing them to paper. Work in older pupils' books is typified by writing containing fronted adverbials, expanded noun phrases and a range of punctuation used for effect.
- Your chosen approach to focus on practical activities is engaging boys more and sparking their enthusiasm for writing. When this is coupled with an emphasis on getting the technical aspects of composition correct, pupils make swifter progress in their writing. This was seen, for example, in pupils' work to describe a waterfall in North America when studying this topic in geography.
- Strategies to improve pupils' performance in phonics last year are also impressive. On our learning walk, we particularly noted pupils' accuracy in their knowledge of phonics. Pupils confidently identify sounds that do not conform to traditional phonetic patterns, such as the 'a' in want. Such approaches are ensuring that pupils' attainment in the Year 1 phonics screening check has risen to at least the national average. Therefore, the firm foundations on which to build future successes in reading are being established.
- This good foundation in phonics has not always been evident. Work in the books of some older pupils shows a degree of fragility when using phonic knowledge to spell more complex words. Consequently some spelling errors persist even for able pupils who can organise their thoughts and ideas to produce technically accurate pieces of work that are grammatically correct. The legacy of weaker phonics and spelling is holding back their even better achievement.
- Younger boys' physical development to help improve their motor control skills did not receive close enough attention in the past. Currently, younger children receive a broad range of experiences through 'dough disco' and 'funky finger' exercises that effectively build their muscle development and improve their pencil control. Older boys' work illustrates the legacy of weaker provision earlier in their school life. As a result, the presentation and handwriting of many boys is weaker than that of girls.
- Teaching is typically characterised by high expectations, strong relationships with pupils and happy, productive classroom environments. Your approach to the curriculum is benefiting all pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils. The observations we made during my visit, and the pupils' books we reviewed, show that disadvantaged pupils are making strong gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding. Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. They are learning to be even more resilient when faced with trickier tasks and to be more reflective about what they have learned; skills that will serve them well as life-long learners.
- The early years leader, special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo) and key stage 1 leader all hold a good understanding of the 'early help' requirements. Case studies and discussions show that support is provided as soon as a problem

is identified, at any point in the school. Adults discuss concerns with the designated safeguarding lead and SENCo alongside other agencies to undertake an early help assessment. Excellent links exist with the local feeder pre-school to ensure a very smooth transition of information when children join school. Consequently, all children in the early years, including disadvantaged children, are well supported and achieving well.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are also supported well. Your careful analysis of pupils' individual needs enables the SENCo to identify genuine barriers to cognition and development. You contrast this well with other pupils who simply need to catch up with their learning to reach the standards expected for their age. Fortnightly checks on the progress of pupils with identified needs ensures that more pupils are making good or better progress from their starting points.
- Training provided by the trust is ensuring that middle leaders are contributing more strongly than in the past to school improvement. Leaders hold significant amounts of information on the attainment and progress of pupils. A broad range of monitoring activities are used from which improvements can be made. You agree that monitoring needs an even sharper focus by middle leaders on the precise gains in knowledge, skill and understanding made by different groups of pupils. This would allow even more penetrating analyses of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that the:

- handwriting and presentation of boys' work improves
- quality of spelling for those older pupils who previously did not reach the standards expected in the Year 1 phonics check, improves
- quality of monitoring by middle leaders focuses on the progress of different groups of pupils more closely
- additional funding to increase pupils' participation in physical activity and improve their performance in physical education (PE) is used in accordance with the guidance as set out by the Department of Education.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local 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

Richard Light
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the executive headteacher, the leaders for English, mathematics, the early years and special educational needs. Six members of the governing body, including the chair, met the inspector to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The views of a number of parents were gathered through their responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Visits to classrooms were conducted jointly with you to evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' learning, to review the quality of pupils' work over time, and to listen to pupils read and talk informally with them about their experiences of school. A range of documentary evidence was evaluated, including documents relating to safeguarding and governance. The inspector met with a group of pupils from Year 6.