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Dear Ms Wong

Short inspection of Athelney Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 24 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 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You have an accurate view of the school's performance and have correctly identified the strengths and areas for development.

The previous inspection report identified the need for improvement in aspects of teaching. Since your appointment in 2014, you have successfully tackled the weaker teaching that caused pupils' achievement to dip, as reflected in the 2016 national assessments. Together with your senior team, you have improved the quality of teaching, for example by implementing a mentoring programme. Leaders clearly communicate their expectations by setting out 'non-negotiables' for class teachers around pupils' learning, progress and behaviour.

The previous inspection report also identified boys' writing as an area for improvement. Strategies adopted by the school have included a review of the curriculum to consider pupils' interests. The curriculum now incorporates a broader range of visits, offering pupils, particularly boys, practical and meaningful experiences for writing. As a result, pupils are motivated by texts and engage in discussion, which helps them to write at length.

Pupils enjoy their learning. They told the inspector, 'learning is fun because we get to learn about new things we haven't learnt before.' Pupils are trained to take on responsibilities such as anti-bullying ambassadors who help to minimise incidents of bullying at the school. Pupils conduct themselves in an orderly manner around the school, which contributes to a calm learning environment.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding procedures are robust and fit for purpose. The designated safeguarding lead keeps records that are detailed and of high quality, including referrals made to the local authority and child protection plans. Leaders have adopted a culture of 'safeguarding is everybody's business' to keep pupils safe.

There are safeguarding notices in prominent places around the school, providing information on who to contact should any member of the school community need to raise a concern. Staff have received training, which includes identifying the risks of child abuse, keeping pupils safe and the 'Prevent' duty. Consequently, staff are quick to notice any changes in pupils' behaviour that may put them at risk from any form of danger. Pupils told me that they learn how to stay safe through the curriculum. For example, during their computing lessons pupils learn how to stay safe online.

Inspection findings

- My first key line of enquiry explored the actions leaders are taking to speed up the rates of progress for pupils in mathematics and reading at key stage 2. My focus was specifically on the differences between groups of pupils. You had already identified that the rates of progress for particular groups of pupils is an area to improve.
- In mathematics, you have implemented a programme that focuses on pupils acquiring basic mathematical skills. Leaders have tailored interventions to ensure that pupils make swift progress by identifying gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills. Middle leaders work closely with teaching assistants to deliver these interventions. The assessment information shows that all groups of pupils in key stage 2 are now making good progress. More pupils in Year 6 are working within the expected standard for their age in mathematics. The identified groups, disadvantaged pupils, boys and the most able, are now making good progress.
- The work in pupils' books shows that they are gaining skills in a range of mathematical topics such as number and fractions. Pupils are given sufficient opportunities to solve problems, but not to develop their reasoning skills and explain their answers.
- In reading, leaders have reviewed teaching methods, especially in key stage 2. There is now a daily commitment to reading. Additionally, there are more occasions for pupils to develop their reading abilities through different activities. These include visits to the local library and regular opportunities to discuss texts they have read.
- The school's assessment information indicates that pupils, particularly the disadvantaged pupils and girls, are making good progress in their reading. Pupils read with fluency and accuracy. They make predictions about what might happen next based on the text and show an accurate understanding of what they have read. Pupils demonstrate a pleasure for reading and appreciate initiatives such as the 'summer reading challenge' that motivates them to read a wide range of

books.

- In key stage 1, however, the most able pupils, especially the most able disadvantaged pupils, are not consistently challenged to read ambitious texts; neither do they have sufficient opportunity to further develop their writing skills.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making good progress in reading and writing because their learning needs are addressed. This was clearly evident in their writing books. Teaching assistants effectively support pupils in their learning, which contributes to the progress they make.
- I explored the effectiveness of the teaching of phonics in challenging and supporting disadvantaged pupils so they achieve as well as other pupils nationally in the phonics screening check.
- Teachers have received effective training to support their teaching of phonics. Leaders have re-organised the teaching of phonics so that it is taught in smaller groups. Teachers track and check pupils' phonic knowledge and skills regularly. They are able to identify gaps in pupils' learning and address these quickly. The school's assessment information shows that disadvantaged pupils are working at the expected level, so they are on track to meet the standard in the phonics check in 2017.
- Lower attaining pupils at key stage 1 are also using their phonics knowledge well to read and spell unfamiliar words. Adults effectively support these pupils to apply phonics to reading and writing. As a result, they make good progress.
- Finally, I focused on whether leaders are taking effective actions to improve attendance for all pupils, especially boys, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and pupils eligible for free school meals.
- Leaders have put into place effective systems to improve attendance. For example, pupils are given attendance targets and are rewarded during assemblies for their good attendance. Leaders have increased the hours of support they receive from external agencies to work closely with families. Despite the recent improvements, overall attendance is below the national average. Leaders agree that attendance could be further improved.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils, in particular the most able, are given more opportunities to explain their mathematical reasoning and understanding
- the most able pupils in key stage 1 are consistently challenged to further develop their writing skills and read ambitious texts so they achieve the greater depth standard expected for their age by the end of Year 2
- overall attendance improves, especially that of boys, pupils who are eligible for free school meals and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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

Yours sincerely

Rajeshree Mehta
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I agreed to prioritise the following areas with the school at the start of the inspection:

- the actions leaders are taking to accelerate progress for pupils in reading and mathematics at the end of key stage 2, especially for disadvantaged pupils, girls, boys and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the effectiveness of phonics provision in supporting and challenging disadvantaged pupils so they achieve as well as other pupils nationally, and low attainers in their reading at key stage 1
- leaders' actions to improve attendance
- safeguarding arrangements.

I carried out the following activities to explore these areas during the inspection:

- held meetings with you and your leadership team and members of the governing body
- jointly observed learning and scrutinised pupils' work with you and one senior leader. During visits to lessons, listened to pupils reading and spoke to them about their learning
- took into account 30 responses from the pupils' questionnaire
- took into consideration 47 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 26 responses from the staff questionnaire
- scrutinised documentation including: the school development plan; the school self-evaluation; assessment and behaviour information; pupils' attendance information; the single central record, safer recruitment files and documentation related to safeguarding; and minutes of the governing body meetings
- formally met with a group of key stage 2 pupils, including the head girl of the school.