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Mrs Deborah Tregellas
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Dear Deborah Tregellas

Short inspection of Pondhu Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The collective contribution of you, staff and governors, pupils and parents plays a significant part in the continuing development and success of your school. The deep involvement of all concerned ensures that everyone is aware of their roles and responsibilities, and the part they play in securing improvements. You have the highest respect from staff, pupils and parents alike because at the heart of your work you communicate a clear vision of what you want Pondhu School to provide for its pupils, families and community. You support everyone to achieve their best through a focus on rapid progress, the cultivation of pupils' personal attributes and the development of effective learning habits. The curriculum, combined with the extremely wide range of external support offered to parents, serves pupils well. Ultimately, when pupils leave Pondhu School, they are well equipped – socially, emotionally and academically – to deal with any future challenges they may face successfully.

You have built a very effective leadership team around you who share in your vision of what can be achieved. Together, you invest in children's futures from the earliest possible moment and are successfully steering the school's course towards the highest standards of teaching and pupils' achievement. You recognise that achieving the best requires a culture of continuous improvement both within the school and beyond, in the wider community. In striving to reach this aim, you draw well on the expertise of staff to help pupils and their families overcome significant social, emotional and personal barriers to success. Improvements start with placing pupils'

views at the centre of your work. The extremely wide range of pupil committees, from the 'school parliament' to the 'stay safe mentors', reflect your distinctive approach and embody the character of your school. It is also recognised in the national awards received. Your emphasis on promoting 'pupils' rights' is an integral part of your work and supports pupils' personal and academic achievement strongly. The school development plan includes pupils' assessments of the school's performance to state what needs to be done, and by when, for success to be achieved. This results in an honest dialogue between staff and governors about what is working and what still needs to be done.

Improvements across the school are evident since the time of the last inspection. At that time, attainment in writing was identified as in need of attention, as was the level of challenge for the most able pupils. You continue to address these aspects successfully. For example, last year more pupils reached the higher standards, or 'greater depth', than other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics at key stage 1. By the end of Year 2, the performance of the most able pupils was significantly above average. Standards in writing have also improved, especially for middle-ability pupils who are now far more engaged in their learning and the activities planned. You have effective plans in place to further improve the curriculum in mathematics and the quality of spelling for some older pupils.

Several aspects of your work illustrate highly effective practice. The quality of written records that evaluate the quality of teaching over time are detailed, precise and informative. Reports provided by leaders to the governing board are extremely thorough and pertinent. Case studies illustrating the support provided to vulnerable pupils, families or pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are exemplary. Such examples highlight your core purpose: supporting pupils and their families in the very best way you can. Overall, staff, pupils and parents alike welcome your consistent approach, your high expectations and hold great trust and confidence in your leadership.

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 very close links and the extremely proactive work by your parent support adviser with other professionals, such as social workers, ensures that referrals for more specialist support are managed exceptionally well.

You invest significant time in 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 adults and children so that discussion is open and honest. Pupils quickly develop 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 girls were performing in mathematics. We also looked at how well pupils were being enabled to reach the standards expected in the Year 1 phonics check. Another area we explored was the extent to which pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are being supported to achieve well. Finally, we examined how effectively teaching is helping boys to achieve as well as they can in the early years.
- In 2016, girls did not achieve as well as hoped in mathematics. Girls' attainment was below average. Specific additional needs and personal circumstances contributed to this unanticipated outcome. Your emphasis on developing pupils' mathematical language and reasoning is ensuring that more girls are on track from their starting points to reach the standard expected than in 2016.
- The curriculum in mathematics is not, however, enabling more pupils of lower or average prior attainment to reach higher standards. Across the school, concepts are not developed deeply enough for these pupils. Topics jump from one area of mathematics to another too quickly. As a result, not enough of these pupils are progressing as well as their more able peers. This was evident when discussing mathematical concepts with some Year 5 and 6 girls.
- The subject leader for mathematics has a good understanding of the requirements for the national curriculum in mathematics. Some good mathematical practice exists, for instance, in Year 4. Good questions such as, 'How do you know?'; 'Why do you think that?'; and 'What do we know about numbers work to solve this?' challenge pupils to make good progress in developing their reasoning skills. However, the school's chosen approach to develop pupils' conceptual understanding is not yet consistently applied across the school.
- A thorough review of how phonics is taught by your early years leader, following the outcomes last year, has resulted in well-conceived changes to practice. You recognised the need to start more determined work to address gaps in children's early language skills earlier in their time at school. The new programme to develop children's understanding of rhyme and recognition of letters and the sounds they make in the early years is having a profound impact on boys in particular. Boys in Reception confidently use their good phonic knowledge to write phonetically plausible words when learning about the signs of spring.
- The revised strategies to improve pupils' performance in phonics are proving successful. On our learning walk, we particularly noted Year 1 pupils' accuracy in their knowledge of phonics. Adults carefully check on pupils' work through listening and watching during lessons to spot and tackle misconceptions

immediately. Such approaches are ensuring that pupils' attainment in the Year 1 phonics screening check is rising 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 show a degree of uncertainty when using phonic knowledge to spell more complex words. Consequently, some spelling errors persist even for able pupils. Pupils organise their thoughts and ideas well to produce technically accurate pieces of work that are grammatically correct. However, the legacy of weaker phonics and spelling is holding them back from achieving even better.
- 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 illustrate your strong contribution to broadening pupils' cultural awareness. World maps are used effectively with news bulletins to deepen pupils' knowledge of wider world issues.
- The early years leader, special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and parent support adviser all hold an expert 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 early help assessments. Excellent links exist with a very wide range of external agencies. Consequently, all children, including those in the early years and disadvantaged children, are well supported and achieving well.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are 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. Interventions to support pupils' progress are adapted following the analysis of information from termly checks. This approach is ensuring that more pupils are making good or better progress from their starting points.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that the:

- curriculum in mathematics is developed so that understanding of concepts is fully developed within and across year groups and all pupils are supported to reach even higher standards
- quality of spelling for those older pupils, especially those who previously did not reach the standards expected in the Year 1 phonics check, improves.

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 Cornwall. 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, your assistant headteachers, and the leaders for English, mathematics, early years and special educational needs. Two members of the governing body met with me to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I conducted a telephone call with the chair of the governing body. The views of a number of parents were gathered through their responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also spoke to a number of parents when they were listening to their children read or dropping their children off at school. I conducted visits to classrooms 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 to talk informally with them about their experiences of school. I evaluated a range of documentary evidence, including documents relating to safeguarding and governance. I met with the 'school parliament' and a group of girls from Years 5 and 6 to gain their views of the school and mathematics in particular.