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Mrs Louise Sandy  
Acting Headteacher  
The Abbey CofE VA Primary School  
St James's Street  
Shaftesbury  
Dorset  
SP7 8HQ

Dear Mrs Sandy

### **Short inspection of The Abbey CofE VA Primary School, Shaftesbury**

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 July 2012.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You recently took on the role of acting headteacher in the absence of the headteacher. You have provided strong leadership during this time, winning the trust and support of the staff and parents. You have not been afraid to make some difficult decisions which have led to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and the health and safety of pupils at the school. You have appointed a number of new staff as well as redeploying existing staff based on particular skills and expertise. You have been well supported through these changes by the governing body and other leaders in the school.

The school has responded to the feedback from the previous inspection by introducing an assessment system which enables children to reflect on their learning. The feedback pupils receive from their teachers is helping them to improve their learning, but they need to be encouraged further to take risks and not be too afraid of making mistakes. You have also provided practical opportunities at key stage 2 for children to practise solving problems in mathematics. As a result, pupils have made good progress in mathematics in key stage 2. You are aware that the improvements in mathematics at key stage 2 need to be replicated in Years 1 and 2.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They participate in a wide variety of extra-curricular opportunities, including sport, music and drama. Pupils I met with spoke enthusiastically about the orchestra, performances for members of the public and

visiting care homes to sing and play musical instruments. They also spoke of their enjoyment of singing in assemblies. The assembly I saw supported this. Pupils also have the opportunity to develop their own art skills to a high standard in the after-school club. The environment and art displays are used effectively to support the teaching of all subjects.

Pupils are encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles and were animated about their involvement in the 'golden mile', where pupils are challenged to run a set distance every lunchtime as part of living a healthy lifestyle. The school council takes a leading role in the life of the school. Its prominent sugary drinks display provides a salutary reminder to all children, and staff, of the need to be careful about what they drink.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Appropriate policies and procedures ensure pupils' safety. You have ensured that all arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and are of an appropriately high quality. There is a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school. You have introduced a more secure entry and exit system for pupils and parents. Pupils, parents and staff all stated unanimously in response to Ofsted's online questionnaires that the school is a safe and secure environment. Pupils are well prepared to face a wide range of situations they may encounter in the future, including those on social media.

Documentation is thorough and adequate checks are in place for people who work at the school, including volunteers, to ensure that pupils remain safe. Governors check the single central record regularly. Strong record-keeping systems operate in all areas of safeguarding.

### **Inspection findings**

- My first key line of enquiry related to the progress and attainment of pupils at key stage 2 in writing and mathematics. Although these are at least in line with expectations, the progress pupils make compared with reading is not as strong. This is an area which leaders have been rigorous in addressing across the school. Regular writing opportunities for different audiences have helped pupils to make rapid progress in key stage 2.
- In mathematics, teachers routinely analyse misconceptions in key stage 2. This is followed by swift intervention for pupils who struggle to grasp the concepts tested. Pupils respond positively and are deepening their mathematical understanding as a result. The impact of this is evident in pupils' books, with an increased number of pupils on track to exceed the current expectations at the end of Year 6.
- My next line of enquiry related to the effectiveness of middle leaders in improving pupils' progress and attainment in key stage 1. Under your leadership, middle leaders responsible for literacy and mathematics have examined the teaching of writing and mathematics at key stage 1 and begun to implement changes. There

has been a shift in the way grammar, punctuation and spelling are taught. Pupils have responded enthusiastically to the recently introduced 'spelling and grammar workshops'. The assessments they take are showing rapid improvement in the accurate use of grammar and in their spelling. Writing across the school is encouraged with boards displaying topic writing across the year groups. In some classes, staff have introduced opportunities to write about real-life situations for different audiences, for example when exploring 'willow-pattern' plates as part of a history topic, or in writing explanations about mathematical problems. Teachers identify errors and support pupils to improve, as well as providing opportunities for pupils to solve problems applying their mathematical knowledge. Since the introduction of these measures at the start of this academic year, pupils have made rapid progress in understanding and using basic skills in mathematics and writing.

- My third line of enquiry explored the quality of teaching of phonics. Although results have continued to improve over the last three years, attainment in phonics remains below the national average. This is an area that you and your acting deputy headteacher have addressed. You have made strategic staffing changes in order to ensure better consistency in the quality of teaching of phonics across key stage 1. Training and development for staff, additional resources and interventions have been put in place. Consequently, a greater proportion of pupils are on track to meet the expectations for their age.
- My final line of enquiry related to the capacity for leadership and management across the school. In the absence of the headteacher, governors acted swiftly to secure leadership for the school with you stepping up to the role of acting headteacher. While comments from staff and parents were overwhelmingly supportive for the job that you are doing, some also expressed concern for the long-term continuity of the role. One parent commented, 'Our acting head has worked incredibly hard to lead our school and I feel very proud of her.' The local authority has provided support to middle leaders: the development of their roles has supported the improvements seen across the school. Governors and the local authority review the current arrangements regularly to ensure that outcomes do not decline.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- provide middle leaders with the skills and opportunities to raise standards further by:
  - ensuring that there are more opportunities for pupils in Years 1 and 2 to apply their skills to solve problems in mathematics
  - expanding the opportunities for pupils to write for a variety of audiences in Years 3 and 4.

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

Yours sincerely

Matthew Shanks  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, you and your senior leader joined me to observe learning in classrooms. We looked at a large number of pupils' books, covering a wide range of subjects.

I held meetings with middle and senior leaders and governors, as well as speaking to the local authority. I scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and development plan, safeguarding and child protection records, and the school's assessment information.

I spoke with pupils in classes and at breaktime to talk about their experience of school, and considered the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires by 49 pupils and 27 staff. I also took into account the views of 62 parents who responded to Parent View.