

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Nicholas Illsley  
Headteacher  
Stithians Community Primary School  
Church Road  
Stithians  
Truro  
Cornwall  
TR3 7DH

Dear Mr Illsley

### **Short inspection of Stithians Community Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 25 April 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 previous inspection. You have led the school through a period of significant challenge since the previous inspection. You have led with determination and rigour to create stability following a period of considerable change.

You have a clear vision for the school. Through well-focused and effective curriculum development you are now dealing with the academic challenges facing the school. Prior to this, school priorities, such as improving the most able pupils' reading, writing and mathematics skills, were temporarily overshadowed by the need to establish effective pastoral care and support for the staff and pupils. This led to a decline in standards, reflected most recently in the 2016 key stage 1 and 2 end of year assessments. However, staffing and teaching are now stable. Consequently, this year, pupils are making accelerated progress as you and your staff provide them with a good all-round education. This, combined with a strong, coordinated drive for improvement from governors, has ensured that the school has recovered well after a dip in its performance.

Since the previous inspection, there has been a significant increase in the number of pupils on roll. You believe this increase is a result of your strong reputation within the locality for being able to provide effectively for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You and your staff are well prepared for the

challenges this sometimes brings. Effective teaching and pastoral support ensure that these pupils settle quickly and make the progress expected by leaders.

Pupils' behaviour in and around school is exemplary. The school's environment is calm and purposeful. Pupils and parents value the enhanced curriculum opportunities, such as outdoor learning. During lessons, pupils across the school are focused, respectful and attentive. All pupils I talked to on inspection said that they enjoyed school and felt inspired by their learning.

Leaders, including governors, are working on the right aspects for improvement. Governors are knowledgeable about the work of the school and make regular visits to see how well pupils are learning. They provide effective challenge and support to school leaders. Governors carefully check that additional funding is having a positive impact for disadvantaged pupils. Following a recent dip in achievement, leaders took decisive action to use this funding more effectively to benefit pupils. You are now targeting support more precisely to ensure that these pupils achieve as well as their classmates. However, further work is required to help middle leaders respond swiftly to address any gaps in learning in mathematics for those pupils who need to catch up. Middle leaders need to ensure that expectations of what pupils could and should achieve in mathematics in Years 3 and 4 are suitably high.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to further improve the quality of teaching and level of challenge for pupils of all abilities to achieve their full potential. You were also asked to continue to raise standards of attainment in mathematics and English by providing plentiful opportunities for pupils to use and develop their numeracy and literacy skills in meaningful contexts in a range of subjects. Your work in this regard is effective. Apart from the recent dip in 2016, pupils' achievements in English and mathematics are rising.

Teaching of literacy throughout the curriculum is strong, especially for the most able. Pupils have regular opportunities to write for purpose; for example, pupils perfect their skills in writing instructions through practical physical education lessons. This approach has strengthened teaching and resulted in a more precise focus on including literacy in other subjects, such as history and geography. However, some aspects of mathematical development could be strengthened further by, for example, providing more opportunities for pupils to solve logic and reasoning problems in subjects such as science.

The school's curriculum has been reviewed and provides a wide range of interesting and stimulating activities. Topics in science, history and geography are capturing pupils' imagination. You have created a bespoke curriculum, combining learning about local priorities with a wider understanding of the world as a global community. Tolerance and respect for others and an understanding of democracy are promoted well through the curriculum and, as a result, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

Pupils report that they feel safe in school and know that they can share worries or concerns with any of the adults who work there. Pupils talk with confidence about keeping safe when using new technologies and know that they must not give out personal information online.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Any unreported absences or patterns of non-attendance are carefully checked and monitored to ensure that all pupils are safe and not in any danger if away from school. You have ensured that all staff have received training in child protection. You and your governors know that it is important that any new staff complete all relevant training, including about the prevention of extremism, radicalisation, female genital mutilation and child sexual exploitation.

## **Inspection findings**

- We agreed that my first line of enquiry would be to check the impact of leaders' actions to ensure that the key stage 2 curriculum and teaching are effective in providing sufficient opportunities for pupils of all abilities, especially the most able, to achieve their full potential.
- The skilful way in which teachers consistently plan lessons, meeting not only the needs of the mixed-age group classes but also stretching and challenging the most able pupils, has successfully ensured that most groups are making better progress across key stage 2. Inspection evidence confirms that the proportion of Year 6 girls working at the higher standard in reading is high. In mathematics, a significant proportion of Year 6 boys are working above the expected standard. Pupils who are not yet working at the expected standard of learning for their age benefit from additional catch-up lessons at the after-school club. These sessions enable the pupils to explore any misconceptions and develop greater confidence in basic skills.
- Well-qualified and skilled teaching assistants provide effective support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders use precise targets to measure success from their unique starting points. Leaders take swift action when learning falters. Consequently, pupils make good progress.
- Leaders know they need to improve checks on pupils' progress in mathematics to more swiftly identify pupils who need additional support. More rigour is needed in analysing the progress made by pupils from their different starting points. Currently, there is a lack of focus on assessing the rates of progress for the lowest-attaining pupils. Consequently, a small group of lower-attaining pupils in key stage 2 still have a distance to travel before they meet age-related expectations. This is because some mathematical misconceptions are left unresolved.
- My second key line of enquiry considered the impact of leaders' actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning across key stage 1. Children in the early years are well prepared for the demands of Year 1. They are taught well and make good progress across all aspects of their development.

- Pupils build on strong outcomes in the early years across Years 1 and 2. Leaders have made sure that pupils have access to a range of enjoyable activities which challenge them to think hard about their learning. Evidence in pupils' books and assessment records show that pupils of all abilities are making good progress in English and mathematics. Pupils also learn well in other subjects, including physical education, religious education and art. They are making particularly strong progress in learning phonics and this is evident in their reading and writing. As a result, more pupils are going beyond the expected level in reading for their age.
- Progress in mathematics across key stage 1 is strong for all ability groups. Pupils count confidently, recognise fractions and use mathematical vocabulary correctly. However, pupils' understanding of problem solving is less secure, especially when investigating multiplication and division facts.
- My third line of enquiry evaluated the impact of leaders' actions to improve the progress of boys, in preparation for, and throughout, key stage 2. Following the dip in 2016 performance, your subject leader for English swiftly analysed the outcomes of the latest national tests. She identified that some boys lacked the skills to spell with confidence due to the lack of a systematic approach to spelling. She recognised that, without ongoing reminders, they did not always have sufficient knowledge of spelling patterns to attempt independent writing using adventurous vocabulary. She quickly introduced a new, daily spelling programme across school to address curriculum expectations. Teachers now assess spelling more carefully and the impact is evident in the improvement in boys' writing across the school, especially for the most able.
- Leaders have purposefully developed boys' confidence and resilience in reading. Since the previous inspection, leaders have undertaken a full audit, including a focus on library books, to ensure that the curriculum was well matched to include the interests of boys. Boys are encouraged to read widely across fiction and non-fiction and frequently express their new-found love of reading. One boy told me, 'We are lucky to have our library with so many new books that interest us.' Reading records across key stage 1 confirm a strong partnership between parents and teachers in developing an early interest in reading.
- The school's assessment information demonstrates that most boys are making accelerated progress in mathematics in Years 5 and 6, with a significant proportion already working beyond the expected standard. However, progress across the school in mathematics is uneven. In some year groups, pupils do not have regular opportunities to reason or problem-solve. This limits pupils' opportunities to apply and deepen their mathematical understanding.
- Finally, I explored why the most recently published attendance figures indicated persistent absence as a weakness. Scrutiny of case studies confirmed that the high rate of persistent absence was specific to the last academic year and was related to the health and welfare of some pupils with complex medical needs. Attendance concerns continue to be rigorously addressed. Patterns are analysed and rigorously followed up. Consequently, your persistent absentee rates are now lower.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- lower-attaining pupils make more rapid progress to reach higher standards, particularly in mathematics, across Years 3 and 4
- pupils in key stage 1 are well prepared to solve problems in mathematics
- middle leaders refine their monitoring systems to enable them to rapidly identify, and address, gaps in the rates of progress for lower-attaining pupils in mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the 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

Susan Costello  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

I met with you and we talked about the improvements that had been made since the previous inspection. I also considered your self-evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I looked at safeguarding records and explored your recruitment and vetting procedures. I held a discussion with three middle leaders. I met with two governors, including the chair of the governing body. We carried out a learning walk in the school. Together, we looked at a sample of books from all classes. I had a discussion with a group of pupils to gather their views of the school and their learning. I listened to four pupils read. I considered the 38 responses submitted by parents through Parent View, the online inspection questionnaire.