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Mr Jonathan Thomas
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Thomas

Short inspection of Ford Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 June 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 inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in July 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 rightly have high aspirations for all your pupils and you and your leaders work tirelessly to ensure that they achieve the very best they can. At the heart of your work is your determination to ensure that all pupils and their families have better life chances. You and your leaders go 'above and beyond' to ensure that through appropriate care and support you provide an environment for pupils to thrive. It is evident that all staff, including governors, share this ambition. Staff enjoy working in the school and staff morale is high. One comment, which sums up many responses from Ofsted's staff questionnaire, was 'The school is extremely well led by the headteacher.'

You and your leadership team have successfully maintained high-quality teaching in your school. The lessons that we visited together and books that we reviewed demonstrate that pupils are making strong progress over time, with a large proportion making more than expected progress from their starting points. Teachers, including those early in their career, feel well supported in their professional development and value the support you and your senior leaders provide. Furthermore, the staff survey identified that a very large proportion of staff feel that the school has improved since the previous inspection.

You have continued to drive improvements, raising the standards of writing across the school. You and your leaders, including the English leader, have secured a change in approach and, as a result, the practice of talking before writing is embedded throughout the school. Pupils' work in books and progress in lessons clearly demonstrate that pupils

have well-developed writing skills for their age. Pupils have many opportunities to write and hone their skills across a range of subjects, completing activities linked to their topic. A larger number of pupils than previously are on track to achieve greater depth in their learning. This previous area for improvement has been tackled well.

The responses on Parent View show that all of the parents who responded are positive about the school. Parents value the work that you and your leaders do. Comments from parents to whom I spoke at the start of the day mirrored those on Parent View. One typical comment from a parent was 'The headteacher and staff always have time for you.'

Your pupils are well behaved and good ambassadors for the school. They speak positively about how teachers and support staff help them to improve their work. They also value the range of trips and extra-curricular activities. For example, one pupil told me, 'The visit to the Viking site did not just help me understand my learning; it changed my life.' Older pupils were also excited to tell me about the opportunities provided after school. They were determined to tell me how to make a 'healthy chicken Caesar salad', having attended an extra-curricular cooking club.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. You and your staff respond swiftly to any concerns, following up promptly with outside agencies when required. Supporting children and families in challenging circumstances is a priority for you and your leaders, including governors. Action plans are put in place swiftly for all vulnerable pupils, to prevent and minimise any further risk. Pupils say that they feel safe and are well looked after, and parents agree. They are very knowledgeable about bullying and e-safety and how to stay safe outside school.

All staff have regular and appropriate training to understand their responsibilities in keeping pupils safe. When I questioned a range of staff from across the school, I found that they were very aware of the signs and symptoms to look out for when keeping pupils safe from abuse, sexual exploitation and the influence of radical or extreme views. You go the 'extra mile' to bring leaders from other faiths and religions into school to talk to pupils to develop their wider understanding of the world and religion.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry related to the achievement of disadvantaged children in the early years. The majority of children join Reception with low levels of learning and development. Their communication skills in particular are below those typical for their age. Current school information, borne out by inspection evidence, indicates that the number of disadvantaged children reaching a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year will increase as a result of pupils making more rapid progress. The early years leader took swift action and, with your support, restructured staffing and early years provision. Following her actions, the learning environment is attractive and well designed and conducive to learning. Children are given a wide range of purposeful activities which encourage a high level of interaction and communication

with both children and adults alike. Now, children in the Nursery Year mix with children in Reception for much of the time. This is also having a positive impact on their development, because younger children are encouraged to talk with, watch and learn from playing alongside older Reception children.

- The second line of enquiry concerned the teaching of phonics, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and boys. Phonics standards have been improving over the last three years. You implemented a range of changes to the approach to teaching phonics to ensure better progress. As a result of effective teaching of phonics, current school information indicates that the positive trend will continue, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Pupils now receive high-quality phonics teaching, including those pupils who need to catch up. I listened to Year 2 pupils read and observed that they are catching up, read with stamina and fluency, and are confidently able to use strategies to help them work out unfamiliar words. Despite more pupils achieving expected standards in the Year 1 phonics screening check, the proportion remains below the national average. We identified together that further work is needed to continue to ensure that all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, continue to achieve consistently positive outcomes in phonics.
- The next line of enquiry evaluated whether the level of challenge presented to pupils across key stage 1 was sufficient for them to catch up. Those children who left the early years below the expected starting point for their age are making good progress across key stage 1 overall. They are making rapid progress in their reading skills as a result of the increased focus on phonics. Pupils identified by the school as below the expected standard in reading use their developing knowledge of letters and sounds confidently when reading. Leaders have clear strategies in place to develop these pupils' deductive and inferential reading skills to broaden their comprehension of reading. Furthermore, work scrutiny and lessons visited jointly with your deputy headteacher showed that pupils who left the early years below expected standards are also making accelerated progress in mathematics across key stage 1. Although there was also clear progress in writing, it was not as rapid as in reading and mathematics.
- My fourth line of enquiry related to pupils' attendance. Historically, pupils' attendance has not been good enough and some pupils have been absent persistently. The attendance of most pupils is now good and improving, since the implementation of a more thorough approach to tackling absence. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is also improving. There has been a reduction in the numbers persistently absent. Where there are concerns about a pupil's attendance, you contact parents immediately and, where appropriate, involve external agencies and follow up with appropriate action where necessary. The procedures you and your staff follow help to ensure that pupils are safe and are not at risk of going missing. However, a small proportion of parents still feel that it is acceptable to take their children out of school during term time. Consequently, more work needs to be done to promote the importance of good attendance, especially for vulnerable pupils.
- My final line of enquiry was to check how effectively most-able girls are being challenged across key stage 2 in English and mathematics. In 2016, most-able boys performed particularly well when compared with boys nationally, but there was not

the same picture for girls. However, during my visit I observed that teachers are providing skilful support based on accurate assessments to help pupils deepen their understanding. I noted how this is now an integral part of learning for all classes. Pupils are diligent in lessons and relish opportunities to apply their skills across a range of contexts. Teaching assistants make a significant contribution and are deployed well by the school. They provide effective support and challenge for the most able and are prepared only to accept their very best work. Pupils' work in books and lessons confirms that a larger proportion of pupils than historically will achieve the higher standards, including girls. The work we scrutinised in books matched that of the aspirations of the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- achievement continues to rise for disadvantaged pupils in the early years
- levels of attendance are maintained and improved for pupils eligible for free school meals and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the quality of phonics teaching continues to improve so that a greater proportion of disadvantaged pupils meet expected standards.

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

Yours sincerely

Matthew Middlemore
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your senior leadership team. I spoke with members of staff, including some of your middle leaders and a newly qualified teacher. I also met with four governors. I talked with parents at the start of the day and with pupils both formally and informally.

Together with your senior leaders, we visited classes from across the school where we observed teaching and learning, spoke to pupils and looked at the work in some books. I listened to some pupils read and I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school. I scrutinised several documents, including your school self-evaluation, the school development plan and documents relating to safeguarding.

I took account of the 16 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and 22 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.