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Mrs Jane Hesketh-Williams
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Jane Hesketh-Williams

Short inspection of East Coker Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment in January 2016, you have sustained the best aspects of the school, particularly pupils' enthusiasm for their learning and the caring ethos. You swiftly introduced new approaches to teaching that effectively meet the demands of the new national curriculum and the way in which pupils are assessed. You are well supported by governors and staff. They share your vision and determination that pupils at East Coker receive the best possible education.

You have acted on the recommendations from the previous inspection to improve teaching, by providing an extensive range of training opportunities for staff to extend their skills and develop effective practice. Your new leadership team takes a greater role in checking teaching and helping staff to meet pupils' varying needs effectively. As a result of better teaching, progress has improved and most pupils are on track to achieve the standards expected for their age at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2.

You place a strong emphasis on improving the education of disadvantaged pupils. This has led to these pupils making faster rates of progress and achieving as well as their classmates. You have taken effective action to raise the achievement of Year 1 pupils in phonics, as well as that of the most able pupils in mathematics and in writing. However, you acknowledge the need for further work in these areas.

Most parents are happy with the work of the school and praise the dedication of staff in caring for their children. However, some have concerns regarding the level of communication about changes made in the past year. Inspection evidence shows that leaders are taking steps to increase their effectiveness in involving parents in their children's learning. However, you and your governors know that further work is required to ensure that parents feel more informed about the work of the school and their children's progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your governors have created a strong culture for safeguarding within the school. You ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of good quality. Staff receive training in the latest requirements for safeguarding, enabling them to be clear about reporting any concerns about pupils. Recruitment and vetting procedures for appointing new staff follow the statutory guidance stringently. Leaders are continually looking for ways to strengthen policies and procedures, such as raising the height of the perimeter fence to increase site safety. Pupils confirm that they feel safe in school and that they are well prepared to face risk in society, for example, through internet safety training. The school's website has a wide range of information for parents about protecting children from harm online.

Most pupils attend regularly and are seldom late for school. Leaders work effectively with other professionals, such as the education welfare officer, to encourage regular attendance. Consequently, attendance rates have improved over the past year and are above average.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I met with you to discuss the school's progress since the previous inspection. We agreed the following lines of enquiry: how successful leaders have been in improving the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and of the most able writers in writing in key stage 2 and the achievement of key stage 1 pupils in mathematics; how effectively phonics is taught; and how well the school keeps pupils safe.
- In 2016, disadvantaged pupils did not achieve as well as others, particularly in key stage 1. As a result, you monitor the achievement of disadvantaged pupils very closely. You make good use of additional funding to provide intensive, focused teaching. You also provide experiences to develop personal skills and the ability to persevere when solving problems. For example, 'forest school' sessions help to increase self-confidence through team-building activities. The impact of your actions is that these pupils' progress has increased this year and they are achieving as well as others in school.
- Last year, you were disappointed that, although most pupils achieved the standard expected for their age in writing in key stage 2, few exceeded this. As a consequence, you strengthened teaching by providing additional training for staff in developing pupils' grammar and punctuation skills. You raised teachers' expectations of pupils' achievement by implementing an effective system for

assessing how well pupils are doing. You give pupils clear guidance on how to produce good-quality writing. During my visit, we looked at a range of pupils' work and agreed that, increasingly, pupils write in an engaging and compelling way. For example, Year 6 pupils wrote persuasive arguments about drilling for oil, using technical language and sophisticated vocabulary to good effect. However, pupils do not consistently demonstrate a mastery of grammar and punctuation, and few pupils are writing at greater depth.

- Standards in mathematics were below those seen nationally in key stage 1 in 2016. In response, you have taken prompt action to introduce higher levels of challenge in all aspects of mathematics. Work in books shows that pupils are now making stronger progress, especially in their calculation skills. Your assessment information also confirms that more pupils are on track to achieve the expected standard for their age and beyond this year. Nonetheless, you and your leaders recognise that more needs to be done to deepen the most able pupils' thinking to enable them to solve more complex problems.
- You have ensured that phonics skills are taught systematically. Teachers organise the learning of letters and their sounds precisely to meet pupils' needs. As a result, a greater number of pupils are on track to meet the threshold in the Year 1 phonics screening check than previously. Older pupils read fluently and with obvious enjoyment. They use a range of strategies, including deploying their knowledge of phonics, to ensure that they read accurately and with clear understanding.
- Pupils talk enthusiastically about their learning experiences, such as debating topical issues that inspired their writing. They relish the increased opportunities to undertake responsibilities, for example, as house captains or recyclers. They appreciate the kindness shown to them by staff and this is reflected in their good behaviour and willingness to support each other in school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- effective leadership of teaching remains a priority to enable more pupils to make accelerated progress, especially in mathematics in key stage 1 and in the development of pupils' skills in phonics and in grammar
- communication and engagement of parents are strengthened to provide them with a better understanding of the work of the school and how well their children are progressing.

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

Yours sincerely

Sandra Woodman
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and discussed the school's self-evaluation, information about pupils' progress and improvements since the previous inspection. Together, we observed learning in classrooms and looked at a range of pupils' work in books. I listened to several pupils reading from key stage 1 and key stage 2. I met with pupils to talk about their experience of school life. I held meetings with middle leaders and with six governors. In addition, I spoke with a representative of the local authority. I looked at different types of written evidence, including documents relating to safeguarding and attendance information. I took account of the views expressed by 71 parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, their written comments and the views of parents who spoke to me before the start of the school day. I also took account of the views of 26 members of staff who returned the online questionnaire.