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Miss Samantha Warner
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Warner

Short inspection of Sticklepath Community School

Following my visit to the school on 19 September 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Leaders at all levels, including governors, plan well for future improvements and are forward-thinking. The value which you and your governors place on developing and training talent among the teaching staff strengthens the work of the school. You have developed a highly skilled senior leadership team that share your uncompromising drive for improvement. As a result, the quality of teaching is consistently good. Staff morale is high and their subject knowledge is strong. Good teaching motivates pupils to 'think hard', to work together and to persevere when faced with challenges. As a result, pupils make good progress. One parent wrote 'Sticklepath is a fantastic school. I can't praise it enough.' This comment was typical of many other parents.

Your accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school is pivotal to continuous school improvement. You are meticulous in checking to ensure that any changes are having a positive impact on pupils' outcomes. Your close work with the local authority, external advisers and your network of local schools has served to boost the impact of actions to improve outcomes for pupils.

You have successfully tackled all areas identified for improvement in the previous inspection. Staff training has supported teachers to plan learning that ignites pupils' interests. Teachers make effective use of assessment so that more pupils make strong progress to achieve the higher standards. The broad curriculum motivates and excites pupils to learn effectively. For example, pupils' progress in reading is

strong. You have created a deep and vibrant reading culture within the school and have engaged families well to this end. Pupils were observed relishing reading sessions. However, you and your team are not complacent. In particular, you aim to provide children with an even better start to their school career. In 2015, the pre-school became governor-led. The transition for children has been enhanced with this formal partnership. However, you recognise that there is still more work to do to ensure that the youngest children make accelerated gains in their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

Governors make sure that policies and procedures are thorough and comply with the most recent government guidelines. They reflect on lessons learned from recent national serious case reviews to enhance safeguarding procedures in the school. Leaders train staff thoroughly so that they can spot and act on signs of risk or harm. Staff recruitment is robust and rigorous. Leaders are resolute in working with external agencies to ensure that families receive the support they need. They are vigilant in acting on any concerns they have over a pupil's welfare.

Pupils feel safe and have a good understanding of how they may keep themselves safe in a variety of situations. This includes when using social media. They speak positively about the school and say that adults listen to them and help them to work through any problems or difficulties they may face.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry focused on how well leaders and teachers are supporting disadvantaged pupils to make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. This is because the progress measures for this group of pupils dipped in 2016. You have implemented a clear strategy to support this group of pupils. You track the progress of individuals closely and evaluate the impact of interventions. Senior leaders' regular and challenging professional dialogue with teachers ensures that the progress of disadvantaged pupils is a priority. As a result, the differences between disadvantaged pupils and others nationally are diminishing at key stages 1 and 2. Changes are afoot in the early years to ensure that more is done sooner to support disadvantaged pupils, particularly around their development of language and literacy skills. However, it is too early to see the impact of this work.
- My second line of enquiry looked at how effective leadership has been in tackling weaknesses in teachers' assessment. This work has been transformational. Pupils' books from last year and this year show good progress. Work to develop teachers' and leaders' subject knowledge and understanding of progression in reading, writing and mathematics has led to improvement in standards in these subjects. Early national information for the 2017 key stage 2 outcomes shows that pupils' achievement was above the national average in reading and broadly in line in writing and mathematics. This represents good progress. Furthermore, outcomes for current pupils reflects a much-improved picture.
- Teachers set precise targets for pupils based on their astute understanding of curriculum expectations in English and mathematics. However, you recognise

that there is a need to develop teachers' understanding of progression in other subjects such as science, history and geography. While teachers plan a broad and stimulating curriculum, outcomes and work in books shows that there is not enough attention paid to the assessment of pupils' skills and planning for progression. Teachers' subject knowledge is not universally strong. Consequently, although pupils enjoy their learning, they do not make the same gains in their learning in science, history and geography as in English and mathematics.

- My third line of enquiry involved scrutinising pupils' performance in key stage 1. This is because outcomes in key stage 1 in 2016 were below the national average. Outcomes were much-improved in 2017 for all pupils and those who are disadvantaged, with the greatest gains occurring in reading. Team leaders keep a close eye on pupils' progress and act quickly to advise teachers about pupils' next steps in their learning. Finely tuned teaching in key stage 1 enables previously low-attaining pupils to catch up quickly. You recognise that this approach is now needed in the early years.
- My fourth line of enquiry focused on the effectiveness of leaders in ensuring that the most able pupils achieve well, particularly in mathematics. The school has worked resolutely in ensuring that teaching in mathematics is effective. Consequently, pupil outcomes have risen for all groups of pupils as they grasp the ability to apply their calculation skills to problem-solving. The leadership in mathematics is strong. Participation in international research and projects has led to teachers' increased subject knowledge and understanding of progression in mathematics. Visits to lessons showed that teachers are providing challenging activities to support the most able pupils in attaining higher standards. Work in books shows that more pupils are working at the higher standard than previously. End of key stage outcomes reflect an improving picture in the number of pupils achieving a high standard in mathematics. Indeed, in 2017, a quarter of the middle-ability pupils made accelerated progress to achieve the higher standard.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- school improvement work started in the early years gathers momentum so that children, and particularly those who are disadvantaged, make accelerated progress
- subject leaders support improvements in teachers' subject knowledge and understanding of progression so that pupils make good progress in science, history and geography.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracy Hannon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I worked in partnership with you, the deputy headteacher and the special educational needs leader throughout the inspection. I scrutinised safeguarding records, including staff recruitment and vetting procedures and recent audits. Together, we visited lessons in the early years foundation stage and key stages 1 and 2 and we observed reading intervention activities. Our visits to classrooms involved looking at books and talking with pupils in line with our agreed key lines of enquiry. We also carried out a book scrutiny with leaders of mathematics and literacy. I met with five representatives of the governing body. I reviewed school documents, including the school's self-evaluation summary and samples of local authority visit notes. I also spoke with the school's external consultant for school improvement. Furthermore, I took full account of the 116 responses to Parent View and the additional comments made by parents via texts received for the inspection. I met with a group of pupils to gain their views of the school's work.