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2 October 2017

Mr David Ross
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Dear Mr Ross

Short inspection of Bitham Brook Primary 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have a thoughtful but firm approach to leadership. By keeping the quality of teaching at the centre of all developments at the school, you have had a positive impact on pupils' learning and achievement. You have made changes to the leadership team which have improved its effectiveness. You place trust in your senior colleagues. As a result, their confidence and capabilities have grown. Many now lead or contribute to staff training activities within this school or in other local schools. Two extra classes have been added to the school this year. You have used this expansion as an opportunity to create teams of teachers in key stage 2. This is an example of your commitment to develop teamwork at all levels within the school.

Pupils behave well and work with each other well. They appreciate the many opportunities you give them to take on responsibilities. For example, visitors to lessons are met by 'class ambassadors' who explain the purpose of the learning in their classroom. Pupils have the chance to take part in a wealth of sporting activities and other clubs. For example, an after-school mathematics club is very popular. Teachers have high expectations of pupils, particularly those pupils who enter the school with very weak communication skills. Consequently, pupils' capabilities grow rapidly as they move through the school. Pupils' progress in key stage 2 was in line with the national average in reading and well above average in mathematics in 2016. However, pupils' progress in writing was lower than average. You have taken swift action to remedy this. Provisional key stage 2 results in 2017 indicate that

pupils made much better progress in writing. A higher proportion of pupils now attain the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2. However, new approaches to writing are not yet improving pupils' spelling as much as other aspects.

You have successfully addressed the issues from the previous inspection report. You have provided effective training for staff in phonics teaching and in the use of assessment to track the progress of pupils as they develop new skills.

Pupils' attainment in key stage 1 in 2016 was below the national average. New leadership of the early years foundation stage and key stage 1 has improved the quality of teaching in these areas. Inspection evidence shows that more pupils are now attaining the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 1. A higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils, in particular, are reaching the expected standards.

The governing body has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. It is effective in holding senior leaders to account for the performance of the school. For example, governors are rigorous in their approach to evaluating the school's use of extra funding for disadvantaged pupils. A new chair of the governing body has recently been appointed. She has good experience of governance and is well placed to continue this work.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Your staff are vigilant. They carefully record all concerns they have about pupils. Your safeguarding work is effective because you know the needs of the pupils and their families well. You use this thorough knowledge to ensure that pupils get the help they require to stay safe. This includes support from the local authority and other agencies when necessary.

Your checks on the suitability of staff to work with children are thorough. You provide comprehensive induction training when staff join the school and this is followed up by further training. Your communication with staff is very effective. You have instigated weekly safeguarding meetings with staff and a weekly safeguarding briefing sheet. As a result, all staff at the school are clear about their responsibilities and act on them.

Pupils feel safe at school. They are taught about potential risks and how to stay safe in different situations. Pupils can describe in detail the steps they should take to protect their personal information when using the internet and social media. Pupils are adamant that bullying is rare at the school. They have confidence in their teachers to deal with any incidents that do occur. However, they also have confidence in their fellow pupils, acting as anti-bullying ambassadors, to deal with disagreements between pupils. Parents overwhelmingly agree that the school is a safe place where pupils are happy and well cared for.

Inspection findings

- Senior leaders form a cohesive team. They use effective monitoring procedures and have clear lines of accountability. Consequently, senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching in the school. The expansion of the school from 10 classes to 12 classes has allowed a restructuring of the teaching teams in key stage 2. Teachers now have more opportunities to share good practice and learn from each other.
- To decide if the school has remained good, the first key line of enquiry considered pupils' progress in writing in key stage 2. In 2016, pupils made less progress in writing in key stage 2 than in their other areas of learning. A new senior leader, with responsibility for English, has introduced a more structured approach to teaching writing. Training has been provided for teachers. Teachers are now more aware of the progression in pupils' writing skills as pupils move through the school. Consequently, they plan teaching sequences which are more effective. For example, during the inspection pupils enjoyed making their writing more interesting by using expanded noun phrases. Teachers assess pupils' writing accurately. As a result, they are able to pinpoint gaps in pupils' writing skills and plan teaching which helps pupils to improve rapidly. Pupils' progress in writing has improved to be closer to expectations. Teachers use innovative approaches to help pupils learn how to spell new words. However, some pupils still struggled with spelling in their statutory assessment last year. Pupils have not yet developed the depth of vocabulary to match their improved writing techniques.
- The second key line of enquiry related to the quality of mathematics teaching in key stage 1. Teachers and teaching assistants have received training to broaden the range of activities they use to help younger pupils understand basic concepts in mathematics. Key stage 1 pupils' mastery of basic skills has improved as a result. Alongside the training, senior leaders have introduced new resources for teaching mathematics. Teachers are now better able to provide activities which allow pupils to solve problems in mathematics. Mathematics is popular throughout the school. Pupils enjoy the subject and recognise the extra help their teachers provide. Disadvantaged pupils' attainment in mathematics has risen sharply in the last year as a result of the support they have received. Pupils are encouraged to talk about their ideas when solving problems in mathematics. However, some pupils, especially those who have weak communication skills, are not yet able to explain their reasoning fully.
- A third key line of enquiry looked at pupils' progress in developing their early reading skills. Strong leadership in the early years foundation stage and key stage 1 has brought a more consistent approach to the assessment of pupils' work. As a result, teachers and teaching assistants are adept at identifying which skills pupils have mastered and which they have not. Teachers are able to tailor their teaching of early reading skills to individual pupils' needs. Parents are involved closely. For example, phonics games are provided for parents when they bring their children into school in the morning. Many pupils join the school with weak communication skills. Inspection evidence shows that phonics teaching is effective at moving pupils on from their starting points. Some pupils do not reach

the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check. However, through effective nurture and support, virtually all pupils do so by the end of Year 2. School leaders are aware that more needs to be done to continue supporting pupils with weaker reading skills as they move into Years 3 and 4.

- Senior leaders are ambitious for pupils' academic achievement. They couple this with a genuine care for pupils' personal development. Consequently, pupils develop self-esteem and readily take on responsibilities. Parents express great satisfaction with the school. One parent's comment is typical of many, 'This school has helped my shy seven-year-old flourish and grow in confidence and independence over the course of his school journey.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils understand and use a wider range of vocabulary in their writing
- pupils consistently receive opportunities to use their reasoning skills in mathematics and express their ideas
- teachers further develop pupils' reading skills in Year 3 and Year 4, building on the phonics skills pupils acquire in key stage 1.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and with senior leaders. I also met with the chair of the governing body and one other governor. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I held a meeting with pupils and I spoke with many other pupils informally at playtime and lunchtime. I made observations of learning across the school, looked at examples of pupils' work and spoke with pupils during lessons. I scrutinised a variety of documents, including the school's own evaluation of its performance, assessment information, records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children and information relating to attendance. I took account of responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire from 23 staff, 35 pupils and 80 parents.