

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Carole Shilston
Acting Headteacher
Whimble Primary School
Whimble
Exeter
Devon
EX5 2TS

Dear Mrs Shilston

Short inspection of Whimble Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 October 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 November 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, your leadership team and governors know the school thoroughly. You make accurate checks on what is going well and what needs further improvement. You set clear targets and take effective action to bring about improvement. Under your guidance, staff ensure that classrooms, shared areas and outdoor facilities are enticing areas that stimulate pupils' curiosity and learning.

Teachers and teaching assistants use questioning well to deepen pupils' thinking and to help them become well-rounded learners. Teachers use displays of pupils' work effectively to celebrate pupils' achievements and raise their aspirations. As a result, pupils behave extremely well and are motivated to learn productively with and from each other. Teachers encourage and value pupils' ideas and weave them well into their teaching to deepen pupils' learning and secure their good progress.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to share good practice in teaching and to raise pupils' achievement further, especially in reading. Your determined and supportive leadership has brought a strongly shared vision and commitment to improvement among all those who work in the school. You have encouraged teachers to express and share their ideas and to participate fully in training so that their teaching improves even further. Teachers now use assessment well. They identify and support pupils' different learning needs effectively, and at an earlier stage, thereby deepening pupils' skills and understanding, particularly in reading.

The previous inspection also identified the need to provide the most able pupils with work that is closely matched to their abilities. You have given this close attention, especially by challenging pupils to think and by stimulating their interest and commitment to learning. Teachers have also improved the feedback they give in response to pupils' work so that pupils know what they need to do next. These developments are helping all pupils to improve their progress. You acknowledge, though, that a small number of the pupils who attained above-average standards at the end of Year 2 still need to quicken their progress to achieve highly by the end of Year 6.

Safeguarding is effective.

A strong culture of keeping pupils safe is evident throughout this small village school. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Leaders and staff keep their training up to date and maintain a clear understanding of what they should do if they have a concern that a pupil may be at risk of harm. They follow up risks rigorously and communicate effectively with parents and external agencies when needed. Leaders and administrative staff ensure that they complete and keep up to date all the necessary checks on the suitability of staff, volunteers and visitors to the school.

Governors play a supportive and effective role in checking that safeguarding policies and procedures fully meet statutory requirements. Governors, leaders and staff check and ensure that the school's facilities and site are safe for pupils to learn and play.

Pupils feel safe and their parents strongly agree that their children enjoy school and are well cared for. Parents' written comments, reflecting the views of most, included 'My children are extremely happy and thriving' and, 'The staff understand my children and keep them safe.' When questioned, pupils confidently stated that they have many friends at school and that they look after each other well. Pupils know how to stay safe, for example when using computers or crossing roads. Pupils said that they would approach a teacher at school without hesitation if they had a problem 'because they care about us'.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was to check how leaders, including governors, have managed significant changes in staffing at the school in recent years, including at senior management level. I also examined whether they have been able to drive improvement forward.
- Since your appointment as acting headteacher over a year ago, you and the governors have managed changes in staffing effectively and brought about further improvements. You have built on the foundation of a stimulating curriculum to enhance the quality of education that the school provides. For example, pupils and their parents talk enthusiastically about the 'Fantastic Friday' curriculum. On these days, teachers boost pupils' confidence and enjoyment in

learning through activities such as woodland investigations, relaxation sessions, drama and music. Governors have taken effective action to secure as much stability in staffing as possible. They have supported you well in sustaining good teaching and pupils' positive attitudes to learning. As a result, the pupils continue to make good progress.

- Your skilled guidance of new and existing staff has resulted in a strong team who willingly share their skills to quicken pupils' progress. Parents and staff praise the effectiveness of the new leadership and identify continuing improvement in pupils' academic and personal development. As one member of staff said, reflecting the view of others, 'Staff changes have been managed well. We have clear leadership roles and are very supportive of each other.'
- In recent years, pupils' attainment has continued to be above average in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6. However, some pupils whose attainment was high at the end of Year 2 have not progressed well enough to achieve high standards at the end of key stage 2. Consequently, my second line of enquiry was to examine the work of leaders and teachers in improving the progress across key stage 2 of girls whose previous attainment in mathematics was high.
- You and your teachers have taken well-considered actions to improve the progress of these pupils. For example, staff give pupils earlier and more frequent support. These actions and interventions are deepening pupils' mathematical understanding by extending their knowledge of mathematical terms. Teachers present pupils with problem-solving activities that boost their interest and confidence, especially those of girls. For example, Year 4 pupils worked enthusiastically together in the playground to create their own problems using a set of numbers, and then shared ideas to solve them. You acknowledge that you need to sustain these developments to ensure that all pupils, especially the most able girls, sustain rapid progress.
- My third line of enquiry was to investigate what leaders have done to quicken the progress of boys, especially those whose previous attainment was high, in reading and writing across key stage 2. Teachers have strengthened their assessment of pupils' progress and this has enabled them to support individual pupils more effectively than in the past. Your strong focus on developing pupils' interest in reading has proved very successful, especially for boys. Teachers work well in guiding parents in how to support their children to read at home. This has also quickened pupils' progress. The increased emphasis that teachers place on questioning pupils, especially boys, and encouraging them to talk about the books they are reading, is successfully deepening their understanding. The Years 5 and 6 boys whom I heard read did so fluently and confidently. When questioned, they showed good progress in their development of comprehension, inference and deduction.
- Teachers also focus well on extending pupils' writing skills and pay close attention to those boys capable of making better progress. Teachers present interesting experiences to stimulate pupils' creativity, and ensure that pupils write imaginatively and at length more often than before. Pupils' work shows that all pupils, particularly boys, have written some thoughtful and well-constructed

stories. Pupils, especially the most able, also undertake research using computers to produce detailed, descriptive writing both at school and at home, for example about Brazilian carnivals. You recognise, though, that a small number of boys whose previous attainment was high are not yet developing their writing skills quickly enough.

- Finally, I examined the steps taken by leaders to improve pupils' attendance. Most pupils' attendance is good. However, a very small number of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have been persistently absent. You have successfully taken rigorous and suitably supportive action to reduce their persistent absence over the past year. As a result, pupils enjoy school and this is reflected in the school's overall rate of attendance, which is once again above average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should:

- sustain their focus on improving pupils' progress in mathematics across key stage 2, especially for those girls who previously attained high standards at the end of Year 2
- quicken the development of boys' writing so that more demonstrate higher writing skills across key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Alexander Baxter
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the other staff with leadership responsibilities. I met with members of the governing body and held a telephone discussion with a representative of the local authority. I visited all the classrooms with you and together we scrutinised samples of pupils' work in books. I talked with individual pupils during visits to classrooms, and with other pupils and support staff during the morning break. In addition, I listened to selected pupils read. I also examined a range of documents relating to safeguarding, pupils' attendance, progress, and school self-evaluation and development. I took account of 74 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and, in addition, 38 parents' written comments. I also took note of 18 responses to the staff questionnaire and responses from 47 pupils to their questionnaire.