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Mrs Katie Ayres  
Headteacher  
Downsway Primary School  
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Berkshire  
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Dear Mrs Ayres

### **Short inspection of Downsway Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 31 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 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 joining the school in September 2017, you have quickly gained the trust and respect of staff, parents and governors. One parent reflected the views of many with her comment, 'The transition from one headteacher to another has been smooth and seamless. Mrs Ayres greets and welcomes parents in the school grounds in the morning and ensures they know who she is and is happy to discuss any concerns. She shows a true interest in your family.' Governors, too, agree that the transition has been seamless.

You have rapidly gained a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and, together with staff and governors, you have created a plan to show the improvements you wish to make. For example, you have identified that boys do not make as much progress as they should in writing. You would like the small number of pupils whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable to reach a greater depth in their learning. You have also identified the need for further training for subject leaders to help them to become more effective in their roles. Your plan sets out clearly how you, your staff and governors intend to achieve this.

You ensure that the school's mission statement, 'We aspire to encourage all our children to be confident, secure, caring individuals who achieve success and develop a love of learning' underpins all aspects of the school's work. The school is very calm and well ordered. Classrooms are bright and attractive, with exciting displays

of pupils' work as well as plenty of helpful information to support their learning. There are very positive relationships between staff and pupils and this helps pupils to develop confidence and to enjoy learning. Pupils behave exceptionally well in classrooms, in the playground and when moving around the school. Pupils love their school and they say there is little they would like to change. They say that adults are kind and that teachers make learning fun. Pupils enjoy learning and they say that teachers expect them to work hard. They are polite, friendly and kind to each other. They say that adults treat them equally and fairly and there is no discrimination. In their words, 'It doesn't matter who you are, everyone is welcome at this school.'

One of the actions for improvement from the previous inspection was to improve the quality of teaching. This was to be achieved by setting long-term targets so that pupils know what they are aiming for and by ensuring that teaching is consistently strong in all classes. You have successfully addressed these issues by strengthening relationships with other schools in the locality. This means that staff can observe and share best practice with other schools, as well as within this school. You have opened up opportunities for training so that teachers know how to improve their skills. This is something you are determined to improve further by setting ambitious targets for pupils and for staff.

The second action for improvement was to improve leadership and management by strengthening communications with parents. Parents appreciate the improvement in the way in which you communicate with them. In addition to being visible on the playground, you regularly communicate with parents through electronic messaging systems. Parents spoke highly of the welcome they receive when visiting school. One parent wrote, 'I want to comment on how helpful and friendly the reception staff are, particularly those on the front desk.'

Since the previous inspection, governors and leaders have also overseen the introduction of a new curriculum so that pupils have more opportunities to learn from practical experiences. This is something you are determined to build on. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities that increase pupils' enjoyment of school. These include physical activities, music and choir, as well as a magic club during lunchtime. One parent wrote, 'My children are spoiled with a feast of extra-curricular sessions. They regularly enjoy visits, and a variety of diverse learning activities. I know there are many adults who would care for them and look after them should they need support.' The outdoor area has been very well planned so that pupils can learn outside as well as in classrooms. It has also benefited from new equipment, such as the climbing wall and the trim trail, for pupils to use at breaktimes. There is a memorial garden, where pupils can spend time to chat quietly or to sit and reflect on the world around them.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Staff have been very well trained so that they know what to do should they have a concern that a pupil may be at risk of harm. Leaders and governors have established good relationships with external agencies so they ensure that pupils in

need receive the right help and support in a timely way. They are tenacious in following up concerns. The safeguarding governor actively pursues her role. She regularly checks that the school follows correct procedures when appointing new staff. The safeguarding governor liaises with the designated safeguarding leader in school to ensure that all staff understand the policies and practices relating to safeguarding. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

Pupils are taught to keep themselves safe through the curriculum, assemblies and information posted around the school. Pupils have a very clear understanding of the need to stay safe from potential dangers associated with modern technology. They have had visits from external agencies, including an officer from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, to talk to them about keeping themselves safe. Pupils know about different forms of bullying, including that related to digital devices. They say it rarely happens but would be taken seriously should an incident arise. Within the school, there is a strong culture of keeping pupils safe.

### **Inspection findings**

- In addition to evaluating the extent to which the school keeps pupils safe, I also looked at:
  - teaching and outcomes for pupils at key stage 1
  - the progress made by particular groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
  - the progress made by boys, particularly in writing and mathematics
  - the impact leaders and governors have made to sustain a good quality of education.
- Pupils arrive in Year 1 having been well prepared for the demands of key stage 1. This is because outcomes at the end of the Reception class have improved year on year, and they are now above the national average. Teaching of phonics has improved steadily so that in 2017 the percentage of pupils reaching the expected standard was above average. In both Years 1 and 2, pupils progress well in reading, writing and mathematics. This is because teachers plan challenging activities that are imaginative and engage pupils' interest. In a Year 1 class, the teacher displayed digital photographs of pupils taken during a recent autumn walk in local woodland. This stimulated some lively discussion in preparation for them to write about their experience. In a Year 2 mathematics lesson, pupils used practical equipment to help them to learn how to add together two- and three-digit numbers, using column addition. As a result of this kind of approach, pupils make good progress in these subjects.
- Another of my lines of enquiry was to see how well some particular groups of pupils were learning. The most recent published performance information would suggest that disadvantaged pupils did not progress as well as other pupils. The same appeared to be the case for pupils who have special educational needs

and/or disabilities. However, evidence from inspection shows that these groups of pupils make progress that is at least in line with their classmates. In some classes, there are very few such pupils. This makes comparisons with other pupils statistically unreliable.

- All teachers know who their disadvantaged pupils are, and the potential barriers that might affect their learning. Teachers provide extra support for these pupils so that they achieve equally as well as, and sometimes better than, other pupils. Work in pupils' books shows that teachers have equally high expectations for disadvantaged pupils as they do for other pupils. Teaching assistants have been very well trained to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are times when they work alongside these pupils in class while at other times they provide special programmes that help pupils to catch up with their classmates. For those pupils who have complex needs, the inclusion manager seeks support and guidance from specialists, such as speech and language therapists or the education psychologist. Just occasionally, the work provided for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is too hard in class and this slows their progress.
- School leaders and governors are already aware that boys do not always make enough progress in writing and mathematics, and they have taken action to address this. They have revised the curriculum to include more topics to engage the interest of boys while also appealing to girls. This has provided boys with meaningful experiences in which they practise their writing skills when learning other subjects, such as history and science. Work in pupils' books, as well as on display around the school, shows that pupils in Year 4 used a wide range of skills to learn about The Battle of Hastings. Pupils acted out scenes from the battle and created their own artistic designs, based on the Bayeux Tapestry. This inspired some thoughtful writing to describe events at that time. The quality of writing produced by boys was at least equal to that of girls. Pupils used a rich vocabulary and varied sentence structure to write fluently and confidently, to give a real flavour of that period in time.
- Boys, as well as girls, enjoy their mathematics lessons and they make good progress in all classes. There are plenty of opportunities for them to deepen their understanding to gain fluency, particularly in number. Boys enthusiastically respond to teachers' questions, clearly explaining their answers and demonstrating good understanding. Work in pupils' books shows that they are expected to work hard in mathematics. A strong feature, seen in most books, is the high quality of feedback teachers provide to pupils. Through this feedback, teachers challenge pupils to do more by asking probing questions that make pupils think about their work. Just occasionally, the quality of pupils' presentation is not as good as it could be and this sometimes leads to errors in their work. There are times, too, when teachers' expectations of what pupils can do are not high enough and this slows progress for some pupils.
- One of the other areas we agreed to look at during this inspection was the contribution made by leaders to improve teaching and raise standards. Governors have successfully worked with leaders to maintain and improve the quality of teaching. Consequently, pupils in all year groups achieve well. Since joining the school, you have established clear procedures to check the quality of

teaching. All teachers know the standards by which their work will be judged, and they have fully embraced these high expectations. Staff who responded to the survey were confident that leaders do all they can to help their professional development. Although subject leaders check on teaching, they do not all carry out an incisive analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of their subject. Consequently, not all actions for improvement are specifically planned to raise pupils' achievement.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- subject leaders are trained to carry out a precise analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of their subject so they make a greater impact on raising standards
- all teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do and insist that pupils present their work to a high standard
- all teachers provide work that is at the right level for pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Joy Considine  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I visited most classrooms with you to see how well pupils are learning. I looked at work in their books and I held informal discussions with pupils during the inspection. I looked at your plans outlining the actions you intend to take to improve the school further. I also looked at assessment information and records relating to pupils' safety and attendance. I spoke with parents informally at the start of the day and I analysed the 63 responses to the online survey, Parent View. I also took into account the many written responses posted as free-text. I held discussions with school leaders and with two governors, including the chair of the governing body. I met with a representative from the local authority.