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Mrs Lisa Telling
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Dear Mrs Telling

Short inspection of Southcote Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 November 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 2012.

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 relentless drive, enthusiasm and dedication to ensure that Southcote is a successful school. You have accurately evaluated the school's effectiveness in all areas, and used this information to prioritise actions to improve outcomes for all pupils. The leadership team is very effective in reviewing current practice and swiftly takes any actions to improve teaching for pupils. The middle leadership team is highly motivated and determined that pupils have an enriching curriculum linked to high aspirations for all. Leaders across the school ensure that the learning environment engages and inspires pupils.

The governing body has continued to demonstrate strong leadership and take a very active role in holding school leaders to account for pupils' progress. Governors are highly supportive of the executive headteacher. One governor said, 'She is ambitious for us all, and, with her strong leadership, she takes people with her.' Governors visit regularly to carry out a wide range of tasks, including evaluating school systems and safeguarding. Consequently, they are knowledgeable about the school and offer effective challenge to school leaders. The governors are fully supportive of the school. As one governor said:

'The biggest strength of the school is the passionate staff. They blew me away with how much they put into the school. They know everything about the school.'

Pupils really enjoy being part of the community and they are complimentary about the effective support that they receive from staff. One child said, 'They make education fun, for example teaching us about fire in the Stone Age project.' Pupils behave very well and support each other with their learning. In my classroom visits, pupils were motivated and keen to do well. They knew what they were learning in the lesson, and how to succeed, because teachers explained tasks clearly. Activities were well tailored to the needs of pupils, and adults provided effective support to help them learn well. The helpful displays enabled pupils to check their understanding and tackle tasks with confidence.

Parents are very supportive of the school. One parent said:

'Southcote is a friendly, welcoming school which has the children's best interests at heart. Our children have made good progress in their learning and work is appropriately challenging.'

You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Teachers check pupils' understanding effectively to ensure that pupils learn well. Subject leaders systematically check how well their subject is being taught and the quality of pupils' learning and progress. The quality of teaching and learning is reviewed very regularly by senior leaders and teachers. This ensures that where pupils are not making enough progress, their work can be adjusted accordingly to best meet their needs. You recognise the need to ensure that the teaching of writing is of a consistently high standard to help all pupils achieve their best. In addition, you are ambitious for the curriculum to take even more account of pupils' starting points, especially those of the most able pupils, so they reach their potential.

The local authority supports the school very well, including providing a range of professional development to staff and working with partner schools to share best practice.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. The safety and welfare of all pupils has a high profile at Southcote. Leaders identify in a timely manner any pupils who may be at risk and seek appropriate support. Pupils feel safe in school and parents agree. Leaders work well with other agencies to keep pupils safe. Governors check regularly that all agreed safeguarding policies are properly implemented. Staff receive regular training, including awareness of child sexual exploitation and radicalisation, to keep pupils safe in school. Staff know what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil's well-being. Recruitment checks are rigorous to ensure the suitability of all those who work or volunteer at Southcote. The school has effective systems in place to ensure that vulnerable pupils and their families get the well-considered support they need. Leaders are highly effective in following up all referrals.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed to look in particular at the following aspects of the school's work:
 - the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements
 - how effectively leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils do as well as other pupils in the school
 - how effectively leaders ensure that the teaching of writing in key stage 1 enables all pupils to make good progress
 - how well the curriculum meets pupils' needs and prepares them for their next steps.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress from their starting points in reading, writing and mathematics. The tracking of pupils' progress is sharp and thorough, and teachers know exactly what next steps the pupils require to move onto the next level. Disadvantaged pupils receive a range of useful additional adult support. Individual discussions with pupils help staff to consider how best to support pupils with their work. In the lessons we visited, disadvantaged pupils were engaged and working well towards meeting their learning goals. However, leaders accurately recognise that a greater proportion of the most able disadvantaged pupils could make even better progress and work at greater depth.
- Leaders identified that some pupils' spelling mistakes were holding them back from making stronger progress in their writing. As a result of helpful adjustments made to the teaching of spelling, pupils are now more successful in applying this learning to their writing. Pupils take great pride in their work, and clear improvement can be seen from the beginning of the year. Leaders check the quality of pupils' writing on a regular basis to ensure that staff know exactly what the next steps are for all pupils. Learning assistants are well prepared to support pupils of different abilities. Pupils write well and with interest as they are taught through imaginative projects. Most pupils across the school make good progress in writing. However, leaders accurately recognise that there is more to do to ensure that all pupils, especially the most able, reach their full potential.
- The curriculum is exciting. Staff are committed to providing activities and opportunities that are engaging, relevant and inspiring, while at the same time meeting the requirements of the national curriculum. Pupils are highly enthusiastic about the new, curriculum arrangements, where subjects are taught together in an engaging manner. For example, in the 'Come Dine with Me' topic, pupils developed skills in communication, writing, mathematics and food technology, by buying, preparing, cooking and selling food. One of many exciting projects included 'Around the World', which involved the hall being transformed into an airport departure lounge. Pupils 'visited' various countries, in different classrooms, participating in carefully planned activities to further promote their cultural awareness. Leaders know that the next step is to develop curriculum plans further so that all pupils, including the most able, do as well as they should.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in writing is consistently high across the school so that all pupils reach their potential
- the curriculum is designed to enable all pupils, including the most able and the most able disadvantaged, to make strong progress from their starting points.

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

Yours sincerely

Darren Aisthorpe
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, subject leaders for English and mathematics, three teachers, the head of school, the deputy headteacher, five governors, a group of pupils and a representative from Reading Council. I spoke with 10 parents on the playground, and considered responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 57 written comments. I also considered 55 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and 281 responses to the online pupil questionnaire. Together with you, the head of school and the deputy headteacher, I observed teaching and learning across the school, and reviewed the work in pupils' mathematics books, English books, topic books and learning journeys. I observed pupils at breaktime and spoke with them informally. I also considered a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding, executive headteacher reports, governors' meeting reports and assessment information.