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Ms Heather Russell
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Russell

Short inspection of Stoke-on-Tern Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 January 2018, 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. Together, you and your team demonstrate a depth of understanding and many important skills in relation to the context of the school and the needs of your pupils. You, your leadership team, staff and governors are enthusiastic and are committed to children being 'the best they can be'.

You, senior leaders and governors know the school well. You have made an accurate, thorough and detailed evaluation of the school. As a result, you have a clear view of the school's strengths and you have established well-focused priorities so that the school continues to improve.

Stoke-on-Tern Primary is highly regarded in the local community. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They particularly value the care and support their children receive. Parents made comments such as: 'Staff go above and beyond to ensure my child is happy' and 'Pupils do well – if they need help, they get it.'

Pupils enjoy coming to school. This is reflected in improved rates of attendance since the last inspection. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary because expectations are high and routines are well established. A significant proportion of pupils come to school by bus. Staff take turns to accompany pupils on the bus and maintain links with parents at the pick-up point. Staff welcome pupils off the bus and at the school gate. As a result, pupils enter school in a calm, orderly and well-organised manner.

Because of the unique and diverse rural community that the school serves, pupil numbers fluctuate and year groups are small. The work of some of the families that the school caters for is of a transient nature. This means that the mobility of pupils is high. Pupils join and leave at different times in their school career and stay for varying lengths of time. Some pupils have attended several schools. You and your staff manage this well. You give pupils the support they need to address any gaps in their education and to catch up where needed. However, this is sometimes not evident in outcomes at the end of a key stage, because pupils may leave before they take their end-of-key-stage tests. Equally, pupils may not have had sufficient time or consistency of teaching to make accelerated progress.

You have responded well to the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. The overall quality of teaching has improved. Staff are reflective about their practice and are willing to learn from each other. They are committed to improvement and participate in projects and research about teaching and learning to further develop their practice.

Pupils have been given effective strategies to work independently. Pupils work well on their own and with others in group work. They demonstrate resilience and positive attitudes to their learning when faced with challenges. They are encouraged to listen to each other and share ideas. For example, in mathematics, pupils in Year 4 had to find different combinations of numbers to complete a 'mystery multiplication matrix'. They asked each other questions and worked together successfully to work out which numbers would fit.

Pupils are now developing their skills more effectively in problem-solving and mathematical reasoning. Leaders have provided training to develop strategies to promote a greater depth of understanding in mathematics. They have introduced longer units of work so that pupils can make better links between different aspects of mathematics. As a result, teachers give pupils a wider range of opportunities to apply their mathematical skills, particularly in Years 5 and 6. Pupils in key stage 1 are developing a greater fluency in mathematics. They explore effectively different ways to represent the same number concept using practical resources and pictures.

A focus on the use of mathematical language to enable pupils to explain their understanding in mathematics continues to be developed. Quite rightly, you have made this a focus and teachers expect pupils to use the right language and specific mathematical vocabulary. For example, a child in Reception was encouraged to explain the difference between a cube and a cuboid. However, some pupils, particularly in key stage 1, still find it more challenging to explain their mathematical understanding.

In Nursery and Reception, staff give children many opportunities to develop independence, explore and make choices in the outdoor area. On the day of the inspection, for example, it was 'Welly Wednesday' and children made ponds in the sandpit with foil. They were excited to see the water disappear when they removed it, exclaiming, 'Look, it's gone away!'

Children looked for bugs in the 'bug hotel' and talked to their teacher about why the bugs liked to live there. Adults use effective questioning such as 'How?', 'Why?' and 'What is going to happen?' to move children's learning forward. Children made 'chocolate spread' in the mud kitchen and were keen to show the 'treasure' they had dug up in the sandpit. Children work well together, for example when making a tent with an adult. They also play well by themselves and with each other in a range of activities. Children are engaged, focused and clearly enjoy their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

You have developed a strong culture of safeguarding to ensure that your pupils remain safe. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and receive regular training. As a result, they are vigilant and take action quickly when they have concerns about a child. You know your families well and keep a watchful eye on vulnerable pupils. Your record-keeping of concerns is exemplary and you have a rigorous approach to the recruitment of staff. Risk assessments are routinely carried out.

Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe through the curriculum. They know whom to go to if they need help or support. Pupils are listened to and parents value the quality of care given to their children.

Governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities. They monitor records and the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures regularly. They have completed training and receive regular updates. The local authority also completes regular checks.

Inspection findings

At the start of the inspection, we met to discuss the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement. We also discussed some key areas of focus for the inspection. They were: the quality of teaching in key stage 2, especially in mathematics; challenge for middle-ability pupils in key stage 1; and the effectiveness of identification and support for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.

- In 2017, at the end of key stage 2, progress and attainment in mathematics dipped below national averages. However, with very small cohorts of pupils, results can fluctuate greatly. This cohort had a very high percentage of pupils with complex special educational needs. In addition, half of the year group joined the school at a different time. You provided convincing assessment information to show that most pupils made average or better progress. However, a small group of pupils had a significant negative effect on the overall progress and attainment for this cohort of pupils.
- A clear strategy is in place to improve pupils' progress and attainment in

mathematics. The focus on reasoning and the application of mathematics knowledge, skills and understanding ensures that pupils have sufficient opportunities to solve problems and to talk about mathematical concepts. In key stage 2, teachers are beginning to develop pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills well. Teachers use a range of resources to help pupils talk about their learning. However, you know that there is some variation in classes. Pupils are encouraged to explain and 'prove it' rather than just giving an answer. They are given effective strategies for problem-solving. For example, they are encouraged to consider how they will approach a problem and what they will try first.

- At the end of key stage 1 in 2016 and 2017, outcomes at a greater depth were below national figures. You acknowledged that teachers were cautious in their approach to teacher assessment. Pupils' work in mathematics shows that some staff could move pupils on at a faster pace and challenge them to deepen their understanding. Teachers use effective strategies to consolidate pupils' understanding and application of number. However, some pupils are continuing to practise skills and understanding that they already have. For example, some middle-ability pupils began to lose focus near the end of a mathematics lesson because they had completed the work and were ready for the next step.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is much higher than the national average. You work well with parents and external agencies to ensure that pupils' needs are identified and the right support is given. Individual learning plans identify specific targets and as a result pupils are well supported. Support staff have been trained in specific speech and language programmes and areas of need such as dyslexia. This enables adults to meet the needs of pupils well on a one-to-one basis, in lessons and in small-group interventions.
- Most pupils with SEN and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points and some make very good progress. Parents are appreciative and speak very positively about the support that their children receive and the progress that they make. School leaders and governors have a clear overview of pupils with SEN and/or disabilities and how their needs are met.
- The local authority recognises the strong leadership of the school and the improvements in the quality of teaching. It acknowledges the dip in standards in 2017 but has confidence in the school's evaluation of the outcomes and the areas identified for improvement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers build on the current strengths seen in key stage 2 to further embed the new approach to problem-solving in mathematics
- teachers provide further challenge for the most able pupils, particularly in mathematics and in key stage 1
- teachers develop greater confidence in the judgements that they make about pupils' outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics, particularly for those

pupils working at a higher standard.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Cameron
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, your deputy headteachers and other school staff, including the special educational needs coordinator, who is also one of your deputy headteachers. I met with a representative of the local authority, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body and a governor new to the school. I spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day and met with a parent. I considered four free-text responses to Parent View.

I scrutinised a range of school documentation, including the single central record, your school self-evaluation and your school improvement plan. I also looked at records of attendance, behaviour and child protection. I visited every classroom with you and looked at pupils' work in mathematics. I spoke to pupils informally about their learning and safety and observed their behaviour at the beginning of the school day, on the playground, in the dining room and in lessons.