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Miss Gill Beddow
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Dear Miss Beddow

Short inspection of Dovecotes Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 March 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 September 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

During this academic year several staff are on leave. Some staff have recently returned and some staff are very new to the school. This turbulence in staffing has presented some challenges, especially around leadership. You have taken the opportunity to develop other leaders in school and have reorganised staffing to ensure that you maintain the good quality of education in your school. You have sought additional help from the local authority and have used this well. You have continued to drive school improvement and are tenacious in your approach because you want the very best for the children in your care.

Governors know the context of the school well and acknowledge that this has been a challenging year. Even so, both they and you adopt a 'no excuses' culture. They describe your leadership as 'steely determination'. You ensure that governors receive regular reports and input at meetings from school leaders. The chair of the governing body attends the school improvement board on a termly basis to check how the school is doing. As a result, governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and hold leaders firmly to account. However, they do not visit school regularly to see things first-hand for themselves.

You work hard to engage parents and carers. In Reception and key stage 1, parents

accompany their children into school and help them with some tasks and activities to start the day; for example, 'Brain Breakfast', which is a daily mathematics challenge. On 'Workshop Wednesday', parents can join their children in school for the morning and watch them learning. The school makes good use of the text service to communicate with parents and provides useful information on its website, especially about safeguarding. Most parents spoken to were positive about the school. They say their children are safe, happy and well looked after. They say teachers are friendly and approachable.

Pupils enjoy their learning and say teachers expect them to work hard. In lessons, pupils behave well and focus on their work. They enjoy the opportunities they have to go on educational visits and several residential. For example, to a Roman ruins and a space centre. They value the range of after-school activities they can take part in, such as cooking and archery. Year 6 pupils appreciate the extra groups they can go to after school to help them prepare for their tests later this year. Pupils talked about 'The Dovecote's Way' and the 'secrets of success' where they are encouraged to try new things, push themselves and understand others. They say they welcome children new to the school by helping them and introducing them to new people.

Since the last inspection, leaders have considered how to encourage the most able pupils to think for themselves and work independently, especially in mathematics. They have introduced the 'Daily 10' so that pupils can practise arithmetic skills by themselves. Pupils also complete short problem-solving and reasoning activities in 'Brain Breakfast' time at the beginning of the day. Teachers use assessment information at the beginning of a unit of work to identify the most able pupils in a particular aspect of mathematics. This helps them to provide challenge for the most able. Pupils are given a range of opportunities to develop their mathematics skills in fluency, reasoning and problem-solving. However, on occasion, the level of challenge is not high enough.

You have ensured that the best practice in school is used to good effect to support and improve the quality of teaching overall. You have continued to do this even when there are temporary staff in school. English, mathematics and early years leaders, especially, support staff well in teaching, learning and assessment. They check teachers' planning and pupils' work; they observe teaching and work alongside staff to improve their practice. As a result, the quality of teaching continues to improve.

You ensure that governors receive appropriate and helpful information about the progress that pupils make, including those who receive pupil premium funding. Your end-of-year evaluation of attainment and progress shows governors how effective their actions have been. You also provide a detailed overview and commentary of pupils' progress and attainment on a termly basis. Governors talk about an increased drive and focus on targeted work since the last inspection, and additional help for pupils who need it to improve their progress and attainment. Governors are aware of how to measure pupils' progress over time. They always look at where pupils were when they started and where they are when they leave.

Safeguarding is effective.

The culture of safeguarding in school is strong and leaders have ensured that arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff are appropriately trained and know who to go to with any concerns. New staff are inducted promptly in safeguarding procedures when they start. Safeguarding is regularly discussed in staff meetings and leaders check that staff understand their responsibilities. The local authority regularly checks safeguarding policies and procedures. As a result, safeguarding remains a high priority. The website contains very useful and accessible information about safeguarding. There are several links to other sources of information to further inform parents.

Pupils know that they can go to teachers if they feel unhappy. They understand how to keep themselves safe on the internet. They are clear about which sites they are allowed to use in school and those they are not.

Inspection findings

- Children join the school with skills, knowledge and understanding well below those typical for their age. Their language and communication skills are very poor, especially for boys. Staff have worked hard to provide a well-resourced and well-organised learning environment in early years. It is bright and attractive with a range of activities both indoors and outdoors to engage children in their learning.
- Topic themes have been reviewed so that boys are encouraged to write, for example, about space. A small group wrote sentences about astronauts. In the 'space centre' role play area, children had clipboards and a laptop to write on. However, children did not take the opportunity to develop their writing or language skills as well as they might because, in this activity, they lacked sufficient guidance or adult support. When planning independent learning activities, adults do not make it clear enough what it is children are expected to learn.
- Otherwise, adults support children well. They help children to count objects and match numbers or help them to mix paints to make the colours they want to use. Adults develop children's language by modelling complete sentences so that children can repeat them back. They ask children lots of questions about their learning and encourage children to use language to explain what they are doing and why.
- In Reception, there are a number of children who are still at the mark-making stage and some struggle to write their names. Children often write in big books. These show that children, especially boys, have come a long way from pages of scribble to writing recognisable words using initial sounds. Children are beginning to write very simple sentences that they ascribe meaning to but often do not form letters correctly. Teachers do not consistently address incorrect letter formation straight away.
- Pupils are expected to work hard and staff have high expectations of them. Pupils

read well but often may not achieve higher standards because their comprehension skills are not so well developed. Pupils now use a strategy called 'DERRIC' to support them when they analyse text. They understand the different skills they might use to answer questions about their reading. For example, decode, explain, review, retrieve, interpret and choice. As a result, pupils have improved their comprehension skills and have developed secure higher-order reading skills so that they can achieve higher standards.

- Leaders have reorganised the school day so that pupils get opportunities to write more frequently. Since September 2017, pupils produce a piece of writing that they then improve. In key stage 1, the most able pupils are making good progress but standards are still low, especially for lower-ability pupils. However, pupils in Year 1 have made progress from writing odd words and sentences with no spaces to simple sentences with a capital letter and full stop. Pupils in Year 2 are now writing at length. Spelling, however, is weak. Pupils do not consistently spell everyday words, such as days of the week, accurately because teachers do not have the expectations that they should.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- governors further strengthen their first-hand knowledge about the school so they have an even better understanding of the work of the school
- the most able pupils deepen their understanding further by applying their knowledge and skills in more challenging activities, especially in mathematics
- in early years, there is a more specific learning focus in independent activities so that children make consistently good progress
- adults address incorrect letter formation promptly in early years
- teachers have consistently high expectations in spelling so that pupils make better use of their phonic knowledge and spell everyday words accurately, especially 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 Wolverhampton. 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, the deputy headteacher (who is

also the leader for English), the leader for mathematics and the leader for early years. I met with a representative of the local authority, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body and two other governors. I spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day. I considered 11 responses to Parent View including six free-text responses and three responses to the staff survey. There were no responses to the pupil survey, although I considered the school's own pupil survey.

I scrutinised a range of school documentation, including the single central record, safeguarding records, your school self-evaluation and school improvement plan, assessment information and your pupil premium strategy.

I visited early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2 classrooms with you and looked at pupils' work in mathematics and writing. I spoke to Year 6 pupils about the curriculum, their learning and safety and spoke to other pupils informally regarding their views on the school. I observed pupils' behaviour at the beginning of the school day, in breakfast club and in lessons.