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Mr Chris Hirst
Sonning Common Primary School
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Dear Mr Hirst

Short inspection of Sonning Common Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 8 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 December 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 the previous inspection, there have been significant changes in staffing. You have focused on developing the capacity and effectiveness of your teaching staff. Your hard work and that of the staff have ensured that the school continues to improve. You understand clearly the school's many strengths, but also know that there are still areas to work on, such as progress in reading at key stage 2. Governors provide effective support and challenge you to drive the school forward. They visit the school regularly and check that funding is being used wisely and is targeting the priority areas.

Staff know each of the pupils well, and parents and carers are appreciative of the individual care and support that their children receive. One parent said: 'This is a good school doing its very best for the children, who have a variety of needs. The children are given far more than just a good academic education. They're nurtured and encouraged to enjoy all aspects of school life.'

Pupils describe the school as 'amazing, friendly and magnificent'. Their enjoyment of school means most pupils attend regularly. However, you recognise that the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is an area which requires further improvement, and you are working closely with families to address this.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors highlighted good teaching, ambitious leadership and strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. These

aspects remain strong. Inspectors asked you to improve the systems for analysing and presenting data at a strategic level and to raise teachers' expectations of the amount of work pupils can complete in key stage 1. Current assessment information and school documentation show these areas have improved. The vast majority of staff who completed the Ofsted questionnaire said they were proud to be part of the team working at the school. They said you supported them well and they were clear about what the school is trying to achieve.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school places the utmost importance on keeping pupils safe. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. Your checks on the suitability of staff to work with children are thorough. You work closely with all staff to provide effective safeguarding training and regular updates. There are effective relationships with other agencies to ensure that pupils are safe and well looked after. As a result, all staff are clear about their responsibilities and take action with confidence.

Safeguarding is at the heart of the school's culture. Pupils are very knowledgeable about how to stay safe, including road safety and safety when using the internet. They say they feel safe as the teachers are 'reassuring, kind and helpful'. The majority of parents who completed the online questionnaire agree that their children are well looked after and feel safe in school. Parents describe the school as a 'nurturing community' with 'caring, cheerful and committed staff'.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed to look at the effectiveness of safeguarding and attendance; the teaching of the most able pupils in key stage 1; progress of pupils in reading; the progress of disadvantaged pupils in writing; and how effectively you have improved the teaching of phonics.
- My first line of enquiry focused on the progress of most-able pupils at key stage 1. At the time of the last inspection, this was identified as an area for improvement and you have worked hard to ensure that now the most able pupils make good progress. Teachers share your high expectations that these pupils will achieve well. Work in books shows that the most able pupils are being set more challenging work in reading, writing and mathematics. They are confident learners, who know what they are aiming for. As a result of your concerted efforts to raise standards, the proportion of most-able pupils achieving the higher scores in reading, writing and mathematics in the 2017 key stage 1 assessments was above the national average.
- In 2017, the proportion of pupils that made expected progress in reading at key stage 2 was in line with the national average. Progress in writing and mathematics was much stronger. Consequently, the school is rightly focused on improving progress in reading. You have made well-considered changes to how reading is taught. For example, you have reorganised the reading curriculum so that there are higher expectations of pupils. You have developed positive attitudes to reading and teachers encourage pupils to try more challenging texts.

The changes you have made to the teaching of reading are starting to have a positive effect on pupils' progress. You recognise that more time is needed to bring the progress of pupils in reading up to the rate of progress they make in mathematics and writing.

- Leaders have a clear commitment to helping disadvantaged pupils succeed. The needs of each individual are carefully considered when allocating additional funding, to ensure value for money. There is a clear strategy to ensure that all interventions have a sharp focus and this has helped disadvantaged pupils to develop their confidence. For example, the one-to-one tuition boosters have enabled pupils to develop their literacy skills. Extra support to help these pupils in lessons is effective in building pupils' independence and helping them to become good learners. As a result of your determined efforts, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils that made better than expected progress in writing at key stage 2 in 2017 was above the national average.
- You are working tirelessly to further improve the attendance of pupils, including meeting with parents when their child's attendance has been poor. Records show that because of your actions, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has fallen. Nevertheless, you are far from satisfied as the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent is still above the national average. You and your team are continuing to work sensitively with families so that pupils can attend more regularly and maximise their time at school.
- My final line of enquiry focused on evaluating leaders' actions in improving pupils' phonics. This was because standards in 2017 were below the national average. Phonics teaching has improved substantially since the last inspection. You have provided high-quality training for all staff to ensure that all pupils benefit from good-quality phonics teaching. Leaders make sure that any pupils making slower progress receive prompt and effective support. More pupils are already working at the expected standard in phonics than at this time last year. We observed pupils making good use of their phonics knowledge to support their reading and writing.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- recent improvements to the teaching of reading are embedded further so that pupils' progress in key stage 2 reading matches the progress they make in writing and mathematics.
- absence continues to be robustly tackled so that attendance improves for disadvantaged 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 Oxfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Harris
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your deputy headteacher and your staff. We talked about the improvements which have been made since the last inspection. Together, we undertook observations of learning in lessons. I examined pupils' work, focusing on writing. I spoke on the telephone to a representative from the local authority. A meeting was held with three governors, including the chair of governors. Before the inspection, I examined a variety of documents including the school's website, published performance data and a summary of your school's self-evaluation document. I took account of 110 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 78 written comments. I also considered 29 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 100 responses to the pupil questionnaire. A range of documentary evidence was evaluated, including documents relating to safeguarding and governance.