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Mr Brett Stevenson
Headteacher
Pillowell Community Primary School
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Dear Mr Stevenson

Short inspection of Pillowell Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 April 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You take a calm, even-tempered approach to leadership of the school and the wider federation to which it belongs. To assist you, you have developed wider leadership capacity by delegating responsibilities to others. Staff have responded well to the trust you have placed in them. Consequently, the assistant headteacher is responsible for the day-to-day operational running of the school. She does this effectively, while you focus on the federation 'big picture'.

Leaders are well supported by governors and the local authority, who provide the right balance of support and challenge in order to hold leaders to account. Governors are committed to the school; they visit frequently and participate in various school activities. Governors are also clear about the school's strengths and its areas for development. In part, this is because they have a better understanding of the progress of different groups of pupils, identified as an area for improvement from the previous inspection.

The local authority performance adviser is a useful external partner for the school and has cultivated a good working relationship with you. Consequently, you have requested, and received, more support than would ordinarily be allocated by the local authority. The performance adviser supports leaders' willingness to 'look outward', to help ensure that the school does not become too insular. Belonging to the Blakeney and Pillowell federation also assists with this, because staff are able to share ideas and best practice.

Leaders' optimistic and buoyant outlook has a positive impact on the attitude and approach of the wider staff. Staff enjoy working at the school and feel proud to be members of staff. Nearly all the respondents to the staff survey agreed that leaders do all they can to ensure that the school has a motivated, respected and effective teaching staff. One member of staff wrote, 'We have a strong team that works hard to support all children.'

Leaders and the wider staff have nurtured a welcoming school culture, in which all pupils feel they belong and can thrive. It is characterised by kindness, tolerance and inclusivity. Pupils are also encouraged to work hard and develop high aspirations. Over time, staff have strengthened relationships with parents and carers, so that they too feel involved in the life of the school. Parents regard the school highly. All of the parents who responded to the online survey Parent View agreed that their child is safe, happy, well taught and makes good progress. Nearly all parents who responded would recommend the school. This is a tight-knit school, where all the adults, whatever their involvement, contribute to providing pupils with a rewarding school experience.

Pupils achieve well at the school and are suitably prepared for secondary school by the time they leave Year 6. This is because most aspects of teaching continue to improve as staff have adjusted to the demands of the new curriculum. It is also because staff are responsive to the different needs of pupils and ensure that they are provided with tailored support. Moreover, behaviour is well managed so that there is a calm, purposeful working atmosphere throughout the school. Nevertheless, you acknowledge that certain aspects of teaching could be improved, which will be explored in further detail below.

At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the key lines of enquiry to be considered during the day. These included establishing the effectiveness of leaders' actions to improve pupils' achievement in mathematics at key stage 2 and children's achievement in the early years. We also considered the effectiveness of leaders' actions to enable more pupils in key stage 2 to attain the higher standard in their different subjects. Finally, we considered whether safeguarding is effective. These lines of enquiry are considered below under 'Safeguarding' and 'Inspection findings', where they have not been referred to elsewhere.

Safeguarding is effective.

All staff have received appropriate child-protection training and have undergone checks to ensure that they have retained and fully understood the information. Staff are aware of who to speak to and the procedures to follow should they have concerns about a child. They know that information should always be shared and not acted on in isolation. The school's referral records contain all the necessary information, indicating the chronology of events, actions taken and staff involvement. This process is helped by staff knowing pupils very well in this small school.

Checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with pupils are up to date and comprehensive. All relevant staff involved in interviewing job applicants have received appropriate training to ensure that they recruit safely.

Pupils who spoke with the lead inspector reported that they feel safe in school because staff look after them well. They said that bullying was not currently an issue in the school. All pupils agreed that there were staff they would happily speak to if they were worried about anything. One pupil said, 'All the teachers are really nice,' while another said, 'If you're struggling, you always get help.'

Inspection findings

- Leaders have responded quickly to the most recent published achievement information to identify areas of weakness and implement plans to combat them. Consequently, leaders have acted decisively to make improvements in mathematics at key stage 2. Although pupils' progress was in line with the average in 2017, achievement in mathematics was not as strong as in other subjects.
- Staff are successfully working with pupils to develop their number skills through a greater emphasis on 'mental maths'. This approach encourages pupils to do more calculations in their heads, without the requirement for pen and paper or calculators. However, pupils in different year groups are not provided with enough opportunities to develop their reasoning skills.
- Teachers across the school routinely set work that is matched to the different needs of pupils. This means that lower-ability pupils are provided with work that helps them access the learning, while building their confidence at the same time. Teaching assistants also enhance the effectiveness of this work. They carefully guide pupils through the tasks and encourage them to reflect on what they are learning. In the case of the most able pupils, teachers set work which challenges them to think more deeply.
- Teachers have created rich and vibrant learning environments in their classrooms. Pupils use these as an extra resource to help them with their work. They are given useful 'hints and tips' to help with English grammar rules and mathematical calculations, for example.
- Teachers provide highly effective feedback to pupils, which helps them improve their work. This feedback is provided in line with the school's policy consistently throughout the school. This feature of practice has strengthened; it was identified as an area for improvement at the previous inspection.
- Pupils exhibit positive attitudes to learning throughout the school. They enjoy the work they are set and benefit from good relationships with staff. Consequently, pupils respond promptly to instructions, are well equipped and keen to learn. They set to tasks quickly and work industriously, either on their own or in groups.
- The English and mathematics work of Year 6 pupils is of a good standard. Pupils are provided with numerous opportunities to develop their calculation skills and write extended pieces of writing for different audiences and purposes. The

feedback they receive helps them get into the habit of identifying their mistakes and editing their work. However, teachers' high expectations in English and mathematics are not evident to the same degree in other subjects, such as science.

- Children in the early years are well cared for by staff. They provide children with a range of experiences that assist the different aspects of their development. The activities they engage with enable children to consider and interpret the world around them. In addition, children learn to write and understand phonics as soon as they start school. This helps to compensate for their prior attainment when they start school, which is lower than average.
- Overall attendance has been below average for the last couple of years, although persistent absence is well below average. Staff work hard to educate parents, in a positive way, about the importance of attendance. Nevertheless, in this small school, the absence of a small number of pupils has a disproportionate negative effect on attendance figures.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils in different year groups are provided with more opportunities to develop their mathematical reasoning and articulate their thinking
- teachers' high expectations of pupils in English and mathematics are evident in other subjects, such as science
- staff continue to use all means at their disposal to bring attendance in line with the national average.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spoke to you, a member of staff responsible for safeguarding across the federation, representatives of the governing body, pupils and the school performance adviser. You and I visited lessons to observe pupils' attitudes to learning. I also scrutinised the work in pupils' books. A range of documentary evidence was considered, which included the school's self-evaluation and school improvement plan. I considered notes of visits from the performance adviser and information relating to pupils' progress. Additionally, I scrutinised various safeguarding records, including those relating to the suitability of staff to

work with children. I took account of 32 responses to the Parent View online survey. In addition, I took account of 16 responses to the staff survey issued during the inspection.