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Ms Jane O'Sullivan
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Dear Ms O'Sullivan

Short inspection of Sibford Gower Endowed Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 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.

In recent years, there have been many changes of staff and to the leadership and governance of the school. You have managed the impact of these changes well and staff work together effectively as a team. Governors and trustees from the multi-academy trust (MAT) provide good support to the school and are well informed through your detailed reports and their own regular visits. You have an accurate view of the school's strengths. Your plans set out clearly how you are improving aspects of the school.

Sibford Gower is a small and inclusive village school with a strong community feel. As one pupil explained, 'We are a whole big family.' Relationships are warm. Pupils are considerate and well-mannered towards adults and each other, and their behaviour is good. They speak with pride about their school and personal achievements. Many parents and carers speak very positively about the school; as one parent commented, 'I can't thank the school enough for the support they have given my child.' However, some parents expressed a lack of confidence in the leadership of the school. They feel that communication could be improved and that their concerns are not always dealt with in a timely manner.

Pupils enjoy the many clubs and extra-curricular activities on offer, for example learning to tie knots and the making of dens in the school's outdoor learning area.

They also value the opportunity to help improve the school by contributing to decision-making through the 'Wombats School Council'. Topics about different countries and links with a school in Africa help pupils to learn about life in other parts of the world. However, pupils' learning about other faiths and cultures is less well developed.

Historically, pupils in key stage 1 have attained highly. In 2017, pupils' attainment was well above the national average, and many pupils attained greater depth. During the current school year, this high performance has not been sustained and some pupils in key stage 1 are not making fast enough progress, particularly in their writing. You are, rightly, providing increased support in this part of the school to strengthen teaching and learning. In 2017, there was a sharp dip in pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 2, particularly in mathematics. This year, standards have risen and current pupils are making good progress. However, we agreed that teachers' expectations and the quality of pupils' handwriting and punctuation are not consistently high enough.

When the school was last inspected, leaders were asked to review leadership responsibilities and to improve key stage 2 pupils' spelling. You have taken effective action to address these areas of the school's work. You have wisely distributed subject responsibilities and other leaders are now contributing well to the school's development. Leaders have 'shone a light' on spelling and their effective work has led to an improvement in pupils' spelling. Improved phonics outcomes in key stage 1 have given pupils a stronger foundation for spelling, before they enter key stage 2.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all the necessary pre-employment checks for staff are carried out diligently. Through regular training and updates, staff are kept well informed on all aspects of safeguarding. When required, you involve outside agencies to provide extra support for pupils and their families. You keep detailed records of all concerns. Your well-judged decision to strengthen record-keeping is giving you a clearer oversight of all aspects of safeguarding, including pupils' behaviour and attendance. The newly introduced system will enable you and other leaders to see at a glance how concerns are resolved and dealt with, including the very few incidents of bullying.

Pupils spoken to during the inspection feel safe and are confident that any worries are quickly dealt with by their teachers. They have a good understanding of how to keep safe when using the internet. Older pupils learn about other aspects of safety through the school's cycle-safety training and the Junior Citizenship programme. The vast majority of parents agree that their children feel safe and are happy at school. While some parents expressed concern that bullying is not dealt with well, the school's records show that there are very few incidents of this kind. These are investigated carefully and leaders take appropriate action to address them.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we agreed to focus on specific aspects of the school's work, including: how well leaders are maintaining and improving standards; current pupils' progress in key stage 2, particularly in mathematics; and how well the curriculum helps pupils to learn about life beyond their locality and prepare them for life in modern Britain.
- Together with the MAT and governors, you carried out a detailed review of the 2017 key stage 2 outcomes. You have taken decisive, prompt action to address the unexpected dip. You keep pupils' attainment and progress under close review and carry out regular visits to classrooms, providing helpful feedback to teachers. The leaders of English and mathematics contribute well to school improvement. They provide effective guidance and help teachers to improve their knowledge and skills. You have introduced external assessments to support and improve the accuracy of teachers' judgements. These are also enabling you to keep a particularly close check on pupils' reading, spelling and number skills.
- You are, rightly, taking action to strengthen teaching and pupils' learning in key stage 1. Your close monitoring of pupils' learning enables you and other leaders to identify individual pupils who need to make faster progress. Following the decline in key stage 2 standards in 2017, the governors and the MAT have increased their level of scrutiny. The MAT provides good support, direction and challenge to the school. As many governors are relatively new to their role, the MAT has strengthened governance by the appointment of an interim, experienced chair to the governing body.
- Pupils in key stage 2 are making good progress in English and mathematics. A much higher proportion of pupils are now achieving the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils are developing appropriate calculation skills and fluency. Teachers now provide many more opportunities for pupils to solve problems and explain their thinking. Pupils routinely explain their answers by phrasing their response with, 'I know this because...' This is having a positive impact on pupils' improved reasoning skills and achievement in mathematics.
- Overall, pupils are making good progress in writing. Over time, they improve their stamina for writing and develop a greater maturity of style and a richer vocabulary. For example, when describing a character, one pupil wrote, 'It is evident that his intentions were always dark.' During our visits to classrooms, we could also see how older pupils were learning to enhance their writing through the use of figurative language. One pupil wrote, 'The weather was a fire, hot with anger.'
- Pupils are becoming more adept at reviewing their own writing and identifying how they can make improvements. Pupils articulately explain their writing targets which, they say, help them to improve the quality of their work. Nevertheless, some aspects of pupils' writing are not developed well enough, particularly the accuracy of their punctuation and the quality of their handwriting. We agreed that teachers do not have consistently high enough expectations of these aspects of pupils' work.
- Topics, such as those about France and Germany, support pupils' understanding

of other countries in Europe. The link with a school in Kenya also helps pupils to learn what life is like on different continents. Leaders' focus on global education has helped to raise pupils' awareness of environmental issues such as pollution and the problems caused by plastic in the oceans. You have ensured that curriculum plans include appropriate coverage of other religions. However, this aspect of the school's work is less well developed. As a result, pupils do not have a deep enough understanding and knowledge of different cultures and beliefs.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers have consistently high expectations of the quality of pupils' writing and give greater attention to handwriting and punctuation
- they continue their work to re-establish high standards in key stage 1
- they strengthen communication with parents to build positive relationships and gain their confidence
- they strengthen pupils' learning of other faiths and cultures so that they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Cox
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Together with you, I visited all classes to look at pupils' learning and visited the key stage 2 playground during morning breaktime. I met with you to discuss the school's self-evaluation and with other leaders to review pupils' work and progress. I met with four members of the governing body and the chief executive officer from the MAT. I also met with a group of pupils from Years 3 to 6 and talked with pupils during my visits to lessons. I reviewed a range of documents, policies and safeguarding documents. I reviewed the school's pre-employment checks on the suitability of staff to work with children and the school's attendance and behaviour records. I considered the views of parents through the 77 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and parents' free-text comments. I spoke with parents at the start of the day. I took into account the responses from the 12 members of staff who completed Ofsted's confidential staff survey.