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Mr Justin Bartlett
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Dear Mr Bartlett

Short inspection of Castle Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 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 June 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 have the highest aspirations for all your pupils and have gained the full support of your staff. Staff are proud to work at Castle Primary. You, together with your proficient deputy, have worked successfully to develop the skills of school leaders. They are knowledgeable about their areas of responsibility and have taken effective action to improve performance further. Leaders have strengthened the skills of all staff by providing high-quality training, coaching and support. It is clear to see that strong, collaborative leadership is providing the capacity for the school to improve further still.

Children get off to a good start in the early years. They engage enthusiastically in the activities and learning experiences on offer. For example, during my visits to classes, I observed a group of children building bridges, linked to the story 'The Three Billy Goats Gruff'. They were independently considering the most suitable resources for building a strong structure to support a toy goat. They made their choices confidently, their critical thinking skills effectively encouraged by the highly skilled teaching.

The previous inspection report highlighted the school's many strengths including strong relationships, effective leadership and supportive partnerships with parents and carers. You have maintained these strengths. Many parents and carers commented on how happy their children are at Castle Primary. They appreciate how

approachable the staff are and the caring nature of the school. As one parent wrote: 'All teachers and staff really care about the well-being of the children in this school, nothing is too much trouble.' Pupils told me how much they enjoy attending Castle Primary. They relish many aspects of school life including trips and the wide range of clubs.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to improve the rate of pupils' progress, particularly in writing. You have taken effective action to address this. In Year 6, in 2017, the progress that pupils made in writing was above the national average. You were also asked to provide more varied learning opportunities for pupils. The well-planned curriculum is now a strength of the school. It encourages a love of learning across a wide range of subjects. There are many extra-curricular activities, including residential trips and the recent construction of a Celtic round house in the school grounds. These effectively stimulate pupils' interests and widen their experiences. You ensure that these high-quality experiences are used to improve outcomes in the classrooms. As one parent commented: 'The school has a strong leadership team who strive to find ways to enhance the children's enjoyment of learning through trips, outside visitors and topics in class.'

Leaders have ensured that the school is extremely inclusive. Staff are well trained and highly skilled. As a result, a high number of pupils with complex needs join the school. This includes pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Leaders acknowledge that this can have an adverse effect on published performance information. You remain committed, however, that every pupil should be given every opportunity to enable them to thrive at Castle Primary, academically, emotionally and socially. Your inclusive practice benefits all pupils. They have a strong understanding of equality and respect for others.

Governance of the school is strategic and strong. Governors hold leaders robustly to account for the progress that pupils make. They share your accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas that require further work.

Leaders' self-evaluation is honest and reflective. You recognise there is still work to do to ensure that teachers routinely challenge the most able pupils across the school. We also agreed that pupils of all abilities should have opportunities to practise their reasoning skills in mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders and governors fulfil their statutory safeguarding duties well. They have ensured that staff are trained regularly and that a culture of vigilance permeates the school. All pupils, including the most vulnerable pupils, are well supported. Policies and procedures are fit for purpose and day-to-day routines are secure. Records, including the single central record of checks on adults' suitability to work and volunteer at the school, are diligently maintained and stored securely. You work successfully with local agencies to be sure that the needs of pupils and their families are addressed effectively. Governors regularly check that the school's safeguarding processes remain robust.

Pupils said that behaviour is good in the school. On the rare occasions when there is bullying, pupils know that 'the teachers will stop it'. They confidently told me they feel safe and know who to talk to if they have any concerns. Their understanding of how to keep safe online is secure.

Inspection findings

- Leaders responded swiftly to the disappointing grammar, punctuation and spelling results at the end of key stage 2, in 2017. Recent training on grammar teaching, including increasing staff subject knowledge, has resulted in higher outcomes for pupils. During our visits to lessons, and while looking at pupils' work in their books, we saw many examples of pupils writing at length, while maintaining high standards in grammar and punctuation. Pupils are very clear on how to improve their writing. They edit their work diligently, including improvements to their composition, as well as correcting punctuation and spellings. As a result, many pupils across the school make strong progress in writing. However, leaders are not complacent. They are aware that current assessment information indicates that not enough pupils are reaching the higher standards in writing. Improving outcomes for the most able pupils is a suitable focus for the school.
- Leaders have introduced a consistent approach to the teaching of mathematics which focuses on deep conceptual understanding and problem-solving skills. During our visits to lessons we observed that teaching is very effective in identifying pupils' misconceptions and swiftly addressing them. Pupils show high levels of confidence in tackling mathematical problems and using correct mathematical vocabulary. Their enjoyment of mathematics lessons was clear to see. However, despite the most able pupils having many opportunities to practise their mathematical reasoning skills, the opportunities for other pupils were limited.
- In Year 6, in 2017, the proportion of pupils who attained a higher standard in reading was below that seen nationally. In addition, fewer boys reached the expected standard than seen nationally. Leaders reacted quickly to these results. They have introduced new topics and high-quality texts, which are designed to be more inspirational to all pupils, especially boys. This has contributed to pupils' enjoyment of reading. The pupils who I spoke with were enthusiastic about reading and could talk in detail about their favourite books and authors. Current assessment information indicates that boys and girls have similar attainment and make similar progress. However, leaders have identified that the most able pupils make less progress in reading than other pupils. Leaders' improvement planning and professional development of staff are rightly focused sharply on improving the outcomes for the most able in the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils are routinely challenged to ensure that more pupils make

strong progress to reach the higher standards, especially in reading and writing

- all pupils have opportunities to practise their reasoning skills in mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Lea Hannam
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your deputy headteacher to discuss the school's effectiveness. You both accompanied me on visits to lessons to observe pupils' learning, talk to pupils and look at their work. Together with your team leaders, we looked at the quality of pupils' work in books. I considered 62 responses from parents to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and their free-text comments. I spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day. I also held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority and met with two middle leaders responsible for English. Responses to the staff and pupils' questionnaires were also considered. I met with seven governors, including the chair of the governing body, and formally spoke to a group of pupils about their school. I evaluated the school's safeguarding arrangements. A wide range of documents was examined, including: the school's self-evaluation; school improvement planning; pupils' progress information; and various school policies.