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Mr Jeremy Kingston
Acting Headteacher
Sherwell Valley Primary School
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Dear Mr Kingston

Short inspection of Sherwell Valley Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 June 2018 with Mark Ackers, Ofsted Inspector, 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 November 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, the school has had three different headteachers, the most recent of whom is due to take up her post from September. During the periods when the school has been without a headteacher, you have worked very closely with other senior leaders and governors. Your leadership has been effective. At the time of this inspection, you were in France with Year 6 pupils on a residential visit. Nevertheless, it was possible for us to work with senior and subject leaders to evaluate the work of the school. This is a direct consequence of the collaborative way you have led the school.

By securing high-quality training for staff and making good use of your most knowledgeable and skilled teachers, you have raised the overall quality of teaching. You have firmly established a culture of high expectations, and pupils' learning is moving on at a faster rate than in previous years.

You, the leadership team and governors have undertaken a thorough evaluation of the school's work. This has helped you to plan effectively to address the school's priorities for improvement.

Many parents express their confidence in the school. Comments such as 'teaching is delivered in an exciting and interesting way' and 'the school provides a fantastic grounding for children' characterise many parents' views. Some parents, however, express concern about the number of changes in headteacher that the school has

experienced. Nevertheless, most parents are sure that you and other leaders have 'stepped up and done a good job at an unsettling time'. You have the confidence of the overwhelming majority of staff. You successfully advance the school's aim to provide 'an education today for the world tomorrow'. Pupils enjoy school. They told us that they are confident that they receive good personal support and are learning well.

The school has successfully dealt with the areas for improvement raised in the previous inspection. During lessons, pupils, including the more able, concentrate and work hard. They work confidently and manage the tasks that they are given competently. Pupils' handwriting in key stage 1 has improved. This has contributed well to the better standard of writing that they now achieve.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and meticulously maintained. Staff training is up to date. All those who work, or volunteer, in the school are vigilant. They have a clear understanding of their role in ensuring pupils' safety and welfare. You work closely with other professionals to secure, when appropriate, speedy support for pupils and their families.

Pupils told us that they feel safe and well cared for at school. They develop harmonious relationships, and they are very clear that the rules and routines promoted by the school help to keep them safe. Pupils are confident that most pupils behave well, and as one pupil put it: 'Any minor problems are dealt with quickly and effectively by staff.' Pupils were particularly keen to tell us of the helpful assistance that pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities receive. Pupils talk knowledgeably about how to manage personal risk, including when they use modern technology. Staff are confident that pupils are kept safe at school, and the very large majority of parents agree.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed the lines of enquiry. Firstly, we considered how leaders are ensuring that pupils in key stage 2 make good progress in writing, and if a greater proportion could achieve or exceed the expected standard.
- You have supported the English leader to drive a number of initiatives this year that have resulted in better teaching of writing. The most proficient teachers are helping others to improve. Weekly training sessions ensure that whole-school procedures are being constantly reinforced. This is improving the quality and consistency of teaching overall. Staff are clear about what pupils are expected to know in each year group, and how their knowledge and skills build over time. The accuracy of teachers' assessments of what pupils know and can do has increased. It is ensuring that their planning this year is more tightly focused on moving pupils' learning on quickly. Pupils have, as a result, made much better progress, particularly in Years 5 and 6. The work of more pupils this year is at the standard expected of them, but you recognise that too few are achieving at a higher standard.
- Pupils read a broad range of challenging fiction and non-fiction texts in lessons. This is widening their experience of interesting and thought-provoking vocabulary. You are confident that by exposing pupils to complex vocabulary in context, they learn and are

able to use such vocabulary in their own writing. This was evident, for example, when pupils in Year 6 analysed a letter of complaint and were able to understand the phrase 'comply with this request'. Pupils are starting to use a greater variety of vocabulary, and this is improving the overall quality of their work. The introduction of strategies to improve pupils' spelling and handwriting in key stage 2 is also contributing well to pupils' improved progress and achievement in writing.

- Our next line of enquiry focused on how well leadership is ensuring that disadvantaged pupils achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics across Years 1 to 6. There has been a strong focus this year on increasing the progress of disadvantaged pupils. At the start of this year, you and your leadership team implemented a comprehensive action plan. You have ensured that class teachers know who these pupils are, and that they support them effectively as individuals to achieve well. Although the plan is very comprehensive, it does not identify specifically enough the expected impact of the actions you have taken to raise pupils' achievement. It does not set out clearly how leaders will check if the plan is working effectively.
- Teachers make good use of assessment information to identify any gaps in disadvantaged pupils' learning in reading, writing and mathematics. To close these gaps, teachers provide well-planned additional help in lessons. They also offer extra support through, for example, the use of technology and a homework club. The result is that pupils this year are progressing at a faster rate than in previous years.
- You are continuing to develop ways of identifying the very specific needs of disadvantaged pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Currently, the support that they receive is not precise enough to enable them to catch up with their peers. Consequently, the progress that they make from their starting points is sometimes slower than for other disadvantaged pupils.
- Finally, we explored how leadership has secured the improvement in the standards children achieve in early years. Evidence of the positive impact of actions taken by leaders and governors is clearly reflected in the successful development of the school's provision for children aged two to five. Trusting relationships with parents and other early years providers ensure that children's transition into the school, and between classes, is seamless. This ensures that children's learning in early years is uninterrupted and a smooth and positive experience.
- Teaching and support staff assess children's progress frequently and accurately. Planning is then modified, if necessary, to ensure that children's learning moves on quickly. Based on their starting points, children's personal development is a high priority for the school, as is improving their communication and language skills. As a result of effective actions taken, children are keen to learn, are able to make progress in all other areas of learning and are able to share their thoughts and ideas. A wide range of stimulating activities, indoors and outdoors, engage and interest children. As a result, they make good progress. Staff pay good attention to developing children's phonics knowledge. Practical activities ensure that children's mathematical knowledge and skills develop well. As a consequence of this strong provision, there is no significant difference between the achievements of different groups of children, including the disadvantaged. Most achieve, and some exceed, the standards expected of them in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Reception.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress in writing continues to improve through key stage 2, particularly in Years 3 and 4, so that all those pupils who are able to, reach the higher standard
- help for disadvantaged pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is more precise so that it helps them to catch up quickly
- they refine the plan to support disadvantaged pupils further so that it identifies explicitly the impact that is expected from each action, as well as how leaders will review progress towards achieving what they intend.

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

Yours sincerely

Alison Cogher
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with senior leaders, including the early years leader and the English subject leader. Three members of the governing body, including the chair, met with me to discuss the changes since the last inspection and their aspirations for the school's future. I had a telephone discussion with a representative of the local authority. We looked at a range of school documents, including the school's improvement plan, self-evaluation and safeguarding information. Inspectors gathered parents' views by speaking to them at the start of the school day and through Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. We considered responses to the staff questionnaire and spoke to pupils at break and lunchtime. Senior leaders observed lessons with us. We also looked at pupils' work and information about pupils' progress.