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Mrs Penny Hammett
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Hammett

Short inspection of Payhembury Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 26 June 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 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You lead and support your dedicated staff team with great enthusiasm and a determination to make sure that all pupils thrive. You are ably supported by the head of school, who has a very clear and accurate view of school strengths and areas for improvement. Together, you make sure that pupils' welfare is at the centre of all decisions. All of the staff members who responded to the staff questionnaire say that they are proud to work at the school. They described your caring leadership and you are valued by school governors and by the local community.

School governors are passionate about maintaining high academic standards and levels of care for pupils. They are able to support and challenge you because they receive detailed information about how pupils are progressing at the school. Governors have a good understand of the performance of different groups of pupils. They have also acted positively on the advice offered by the local authority adviser.

All members of staff work closely with parents and carers. Parents who spoke with me during the inspection, and those who responded online, were all impressed with the high quality of education provided by the school. A number of parents commented on how the school encourages pupils from different year groups to interact. One said, 'It teaches the older children about being responsible and makes for a fantastically happy school.' Other parents described the strong support given to meet pupils' individual needs. One parent described 'very personal, individual, and tailored care and support'. Another, commenting on the effectiveness of teachers

and support staff, said, 'They take a holistic approach to each child and invest fantastic energy, care and enthusiasm.' Parents recognise the role played by the school in the local community. One described the school as 'a fully functioning and cherished part of the wider fabric of the village and surrounding area'.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the early years and to raise achievement in writing. These aspects formed the focus for this inspection and are described in the next section of this letter. You were also asked to ensure that teachers plan activities that develop pupils' resilience and application of mathematical reasoning.

Since the previous inspection, you have made sure that all teachers have provided opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills across the curriculum and in tackling more problem-solving challenges in their daily mathematics lessons. Pupils at all levels of ability are appropriately challenged in mathematics. Pupils in all classes were able to give me examples of where teachers had encouraged them to use their wide range of skills.

Your accurate monitoring of pupils' outcomes illustrates how more effective teaching has led to significant improvements in pupils' outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics across the school. By Year 6, a higher proportion of pupils are achieving the expected standards. For example, in 2017, Year 6 attainment in mathematics placed the school in the top 1% of schools nationally. However, you are aware that, over time, the progress that pupils make in writing and mathematics could be stronger, particularly for the most able pupils. Leaders are also aware of the need to continue to introduce strategies to improve the quality of spelling across the school in order to boost pupils' progress in writing.

Safeguarding is effective.

All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Training is up to date, records are well maintained and appropriate checks are made of staff before they start employment. Governors ensure that there is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Parents agree that their children are safe and that leaders and governors address any concerns. A few parents described how the school's split site adds potential dangers, particularly at the start and end of the school day. You ensure that there is adequate supervision with safe procedures in place.

Pupils know how to stay safe in school, in the community and when online. They gave me very useful advice to follow when using social media or computer games. They said that bullying was very rare and this was further verified by the positive pupil and parent responses to the online questionnaires. Pupils appreciate their school site with carefully planned areas for calmness and reflection as well as areas for activity. One pupil noted, 'In our grounds, there is something for everyone.'

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed the particular aspects of the school's work on which the inspection would focus.
- The first line of enquiry considered how effectively leaders were ensuring that teachers challenged pupils in key stage 2 to achieve the higher standards in mathematics. In 2017, all Year 6 pupils achieved the expected standard in mathematics, with a quarter of pupils reaching the higher standard. This represented an improvement from 2016 when the percentage of pupils reaching the expected standard was the same as the national average and no pupils achieved the higher standard.
- Teachers are making accurate assessments of pupils' improving progress in mathematics in all year groups, and this is confirmed by the high standards seen in pupils' workbooks. During our visits to classrooms in key stage 2, we looked for examples of pupils being challenged to reach the higher standards in mathematics. I talked with pupils and asked them to show me the progress that they were making over time and to show where their teachers had encouraged them to work at a higher standard. All of the pupils that I met talked enthusiastically about their interest in mathematics and could show me examples as requested.
- The leader of mathematics described how the school had significantly improved teachers' use of mathematics resources since the previous inspection. Effective staff training has led to teachers using more effective teaching methods and giving pupils more opportunities to talk through mathematical problems with their partners and teachers. School leaders carry out regular checks on the progress being made by pupils in their mathematics workbooks and these provide evidence of pupils rising to the challenge to work at the higher level. I found clear evidence to show that teachers, in both key stage 2 classes, have high aspirations and appropriately challenge all pupils. Scrutiny of pupils' workbooks confirms the school's assessment that more pupils are already working at the higher standard in the subject.
- The next line of enquiry assessed progress against a recommendation from the previous inspection. This was to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning improved in the early years and to provide more useful information for parents on the progress being made by their children. Children enter the school with skills and understanding that are typical for their age. By the end of the Reception Year, increasing percentages of children have achieved a good level of development over time. In 2017, a higher proportion of children reached this level than was seen nationally. Inspection findings agree with the school's assessment that this improvement has continued for the current cohort.
- Teachers and support staff have risen to the challenge of improving the indoor and outdoor learning environments in the early years. During the inspection, children were invited to plan an exciting journey along a trail that had appeared that morning. Children from the Nursery and Reception Years came up with highly creative ideas and described the equipment they should take on their journey and how they could travel safely. Incisive questioning by the teacher and her highly

skilled support staff enabled the children to carry out a successful expedition and carry on their learning in their chosen outdoor activities. Children's learning journeys show rapid progress being made in all learning areas since the start of the academic year.

- The third line of enquiry assessed how effective leaders were in ensuring that middle- and higher-attaining pupils in key stage 2 were challenged to reach greater depth in writing. School leaders have identified improving writing as the school's top priority because fewer pupils than expected have reached greater depth over time.
- Leaders have put together a detailed plan that combines the elements required to enable pupils to become efficient writers. They have also made good use of external support from an English specialist. Regular analysis of writing progress shows that overall standards are rising across key stage 2 and there are examples of high-quality writing in each year group. However, during the inspection, pupils' workbooks contained numerous examples of incorrect spellings that have not been addressed by teachers. Many of these mistakes are for common words that pupils should have mastered. You agree that inconsistency in spelling and the lack of application of grammatical understanding are holding back pupils' progress in writing.
- The final line of enquiry investigated what action leaders had taken to address the difference in performance between girls and boys in reading and writing at key stage 1. Over time, key stage 1 girls have outperformed boys in reading and writing. While this mirrors the national situation at key stage 1, the gender differences at the school have been wider over the past two years than the national averages. School leaders and governors have addressed this as a priority and have also investigated gender differences in key stage 2. Inspection evidence confirms the school's view that current pupils are working at similar rates of improvement in Years 1 and 2 regardless of gender or starting points.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- current initiatives become embedded so that more pupils achieve greater depth in writing at key stage 2
- a strong structure is put in place to raise standards of spelling across the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Hodson
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the head of school, the mathematics leader, the early years leader, the chair of the governing body and other governors. I discussed the school's performance with the local authority consultant during a telephone call. The head of school and I visited all classrooms to assess the progress being made by pupils. I looked at pupils' workbooks and talked with pupils in classes and at a separate meeting. We considered the school's information on the progress being made by current pupils.

We looked at a range of documentary evidence. This included the school's evaluation of its own performance. I looked at various documents related to safeguarding, including the single central record. We assessed current rates of attendance for groups of pupils and I gathered parents' views from 34 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. I reviewed several free-text responses from parents and the results of the staff and pupil questionnaires.