

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



24 July 2018

Mr Simon Allen
Headteacher
Shirwell Community Primary School
School Lane
Shirwell
Barnstaple
Devon
EX31 4JT

Dear Mr Allen

Short inspection of Shirwell Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 July 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 March 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, alongside governors and your dedicated staff team, are determined to continue to improve opportunities for pupils. You have established an experienced governing body that has a range of skills that are having a positive impact upon the school. An example of this is how you worked together with governors to secure your 'Olympic Legacy' funding project. As a result, pupils now have a state-of-the-art all-weather pitch to improve further the quality of physical education and sporting opportunities. Governors are actively involved in the school and make regular visits to check upon school improvement priorities. They do not simply accept what you are telling them and make use of external reports to validate your work.

High expectations and warm, caring relationships are built upon a deep mutual respect at Shirwell. The school is a calm, welcoming and nurturing environment. Pupils are polite and respectful to staff and each other. I was very taken with the behaviour of the pupils and the conversations that I had with pupils. They are a credit to the school.

This is a school where leaders and staff know each individual pupil's needs and abilities well. One parent described Shirwell to me as feeling so lucky to have such a fantastic school for her children. Another parent said, 'Staff know the children very well and they want each child to do their best, whatever their potential.'

At the previous inspection in 2015, inspectors charged you to improve teaching further. You were asked to do this by ensuring that pupils correct errors in their work. They also required that a focus be placed upon improving grammar, spelling and punctuation and insisting on consistently good presentation of work. Finally, you were asked to ensure that activities are sufficiently challenging, so pupils can progress as well as they can. Since the previous inspection, you and your staff have worked tirelessly to improve the quality of teaching across the school continually.

From the observations that we did together, and the scrutiny of pupils' work in their books, it was evident that teachers plan activities to meet the wide range of pupils' needs in each class. Work in pupils' English books shows that pupils take pride in their work and make good progress from their different starting points. Furthermore, teachers place significant emphasis on pupils being reflective and checking their understanding to identify errors and correct any misconceptions. This approach encouraged pupils to consolidate their understanding and skills so that sentences are constructed with growing accuracy.

The curriculum you offer is broad and a contributing factor to pupils' enjoyment of school. For example, pupils benefit from subject specialists to provide them with opportunities to develop their skills and understanding further. Pupils told me how much they value their extensive range of learning experiences to support their knowledge. For instance, a trip to the local recycling centre highlighted to pupils the challenges that they face in ensuring the environment's sustainability.

You have rightly recognised the need to develop further the quality of spelling across the school. Despite leaders' efforts to improve the quality of spelling, this is not yet consistent. Leaders have appropriate plans to continue to address this issue.

Safeguarding is effective.

In your role as the designated safeguarding leader you have ensured that all safeguarding requirements are fit for purpose. Staff and governors are well trained through regular update training to keep informed of their responsibilities to keep pupils safe. Governors regularly commission external audits to take a second opinion on what they are being told and react swiftly to any developmental points.

Pupils said that they feel safe when they are in school and that the school's curriculum helps them understand how to stay safe. For instance, pupils reported favourably on the opportunities that they have through the 'Life Skills' programme, learning how to keep safe in a range of situations and of the risks to them outside of school. Pupils are confident that if they have any worries or concerns they will be dealt with quickly. Parents and carers agree that their children are safe and happy at the school.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed to explore four areas of the school's work in greater detail. My first line of enquiry was to look at what leaders are

doing to improve outcomes for pupils by the end of Year 1 in the phonics screening check. This is because, over the past three years, pupils' performance in the phonics screening check has been below average. Children join the school at various starting points with their phonic knowledge. Staff have the knowledge and skills they need to teach phonics effectively. You have a phonics scheme and a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics in early years and key stage 1. As a very small school, the published data can vary significantly from year to year and does not paint an accurate picture of the quality of phonics teaching.

- Leaders regularly analyse information to identify any pupils who are struggling or who are ready for the next stage of their language development. For those pupils that have not achieved the expected standard in the Year 1 check, you initiated a variety of support sessions, including parental guidance. Such sessions ensure that no pupil is left behind and that all pupils are able to succeed and be competent and fluent readers. As a result, pupils by the end of Year 2, for the past two years, have all passed the check.
- My next line of enquiry related to how leaders' actions are improving pupils' writing in key stage 1, with a particular focus on pupils achieving the higher standards of attainment. You and other leaders have placed high importance on ensuring that standards in writing continue to improve across the school since the previous inspection. Opportunities for pupils to write in English across the curriculum are wide, frequent and appropriate for different audiences, purposes and genres.
- Leaders recognised that teachers needed to explore various ways of engaging pupils in writing for enjoyment. You set about developing writing to be more specific to pupils' needs and interests. As a result, work in pupils' books clearly demonstrates how pupils have developed a love of writing through a particular interest. The actions that you have taken have led to improvements in the progress that current pupils in key stage 1 are making. However, when we looked at pupils' work more closely, it was clearly evident that pupils' spelling was hindering their overall progress.
- Another line of enquiry was to look at pupils' achievement in mathematics, particularly for pupils achieving the higher attainment. You shared with me your rationale to change the school's approach to teaching mathematics. This is so that work builds progressively on what has already been learned so that pupils extend their knowledge and skills systematically, embedding their understanding. There is evidence of progress across a range of mathematics, ensuring that pupils have a knowledge of strategies so that they can solve problems efficiently. As a result of your actions, the quality of work seen in pupils' mathematics books is improving. Further work is required to embed the renewed approach of teaching mathematics to ensure that pupils make the progress that they are capable of.
- The final line of enquiry focused on evaluating pupils' progress in English grammar, punctuation and spelling (EGPS). This is because in 2016 and 2017, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard was below the national average. On further scrutiny, you identified that EGPS was a focus area for the whole school and this is a priority in your current school development plan.

Leaders implemented a series of actions to address this weakness. These included setting new pupil expectations, specific additional spelling support and working more closely with parents. During lessons we observed together and work we reviewed collectively with middle leaders, we agreed that there remain a few inconsistencies in how staff approach spelling, and you continue to work on these areas.

- I was also interested to look at the work you are doing to reduce absence for current pupils. From the evidence that I gathered, it is clear that you, the governors and staff go to great lengths to promote pupils' attendance. However, a very small proportion of parents continue to take their children on holiday during term time. In this small school, such absences disproportionately affect overall attendance figures. Nevertheless, you continue to drive the expectation that it is not acceptable to take pupils out of school during term time.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' spelling is accurate and contributes to improving the quality of writing across the school
- the quality of teaching in mathematics continues to improve, so that all pupils make the progress of which they are capable, particularly the most able.

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

Yours sincerely

Matthew Middlemore
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, senior teachers, parents and five governors. I observed pupils' learning in lessons and looked in detail at examples of pupils' work from across a range of subjects. I met with a group and spoke with other pupils during lessons. I scrutinised a variety of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, current development plan and information relating to safeguarding. I took account of the 17 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire and considered the four responses to Ofsted's staff survey.