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Mrs Katharine Clifford  
Headteacher  
Southwold Primary School and Early Years Centre  
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Dear Mrs Clifford

### **Short inspection of Southwold Primary School and Early Years Centre**

Following my visit to the school on 8 November 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.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified one important priority for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of this priority, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

You have managed rapid changes to your leadership team effectively at the beginning of this school year, appointing an acting deputy headteacher and a new mathematics subject leader. As a result, the capacity of leaders to make improvements in teaching and learning has greatly increased. Your analysis of what has not worked well in the past is accurate. You shared this evaluation openly with me, and I could see clearly the changes you had made to your school improvement plans as a result. Governors are knowledgeable about the school. They visit it regularly and have a good understanding of the published information about outcomes and the actions that leaders are taking. Governors are committed to holding leaders to account. For example, they have vigorously investigated the impact of the actions that leaders have taken to improve persistent absence.

You and your team of senior and middle leaders have introduced several initiatives in the last three years aimed at improving progress. Your own analysis has shown that the effectiveness of these changes has been limited. The actions taken were not monitored closely enough and, as a result, areas of weakness in learning have developed across key stage 2. The published outcomes for pupils who left key stage 2 in 2018 suggest that they made poor progress in reading and mathematics.

Parents are very happy with the education that their children receive from Southwold Primary School and Early Years Centre. Some wrote letters to me to express their praise for the school, telling me how kind and caring the staff are. Pupils I spoke with during the day also told me that staff were caring and worked hard to help them with their work.

A substantial majority of staff are proud to work at this school. The group of staff I spoke with told me that they value highly the training and support they receive.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that pupils develop their reading skills as well as they do their other literacy and numeracy skills in key stage 2. Pupils made better progress in 2016 than they had in 2015, immediately following the last inspection. However, pupils' progress did not continue to improve compared to writing and mathematics. The most recent published data suggests that pupils who left the school in 2018 had made poor progress in reading, and well below the national average.

You and your team of senior leaders thoroughly reviewed the teaching of reading before the start of this year. You have substantially changed the organisation of teaching, learning and assessment. You showed me how teachers are now better informed by assessment data. Leaders are helping teachers to use this data effectively and plan lessons to ensure all children improve their reading comprehension.

In the reading lessons we observed together in key stage 2, staff intervened rapidly to ensure pupils developed their understanding. The work that we saw in pupils' books confirmed that pupils are being regularly challenged with reading comprehension questions. I listened to some of your most-able readers in Years 5 and 6 read. They thoroughly enjoyed reading and understood the texts very well.

Together, we looked at your assessment of attainment in reading across key stage 2. Too many pupils have not made consistently good progress in past years. We agreed that progress is increasing as a result of the changes you have made. However, there remain gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills in reading from previous years.

In addition, at the last inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that the most able pupils are challenged by work set for them and, as a result, make rapid progress and attain higher standards. Most-able pupils were set challenging tasks in all the lessons we observed together in key stage 2. Teachers and teaching assistants ensured that the most able pupils understood the basic skills being taught and then made the work more challenging.

Your current assessment data indicates that more pupils are working at a high standard in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 2. However, we observed that the most able pupils made errors during lessons because of gaps in their knowledge and understanding from previous years.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding systems are thorough and fit for purpose. Leaders and governors understand their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding and ensure that the appropriate checks are completed so that staff are suitable to work with children. The school's safeguarding policy takes account of the most recent legislation. You provide staff with frequent and relevant training so that they know what to do if they have any concerns. Staff's knowledge of their duties and responsibilities is secure and up-to-date.

Most parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their children are happy at school and feel secure. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that they know who to go to if they have a problem. Pupils receive regular information about how to stay safe, including when using the internet. They know they should not share personal information with people online.

## **Inspection findings**

- At the end of 2015/16, you identified that pupils in Years 5 and 6, particularly disadvantaged pupils, had made poor progress in mathematics. In 2016–17, you focused resources on improving their progress. However, you recognised by the end of that year that those pupils who had been in Year 5 had not caught up. You then identified precisely the areas for improvement in teaching required and began rolling out the necessary training. However, the changes were not sufficiently rapid. This cohort of pupils left key stage 2 in 2018 having made progress well below the national average.
- I explored with you the changes you have put in place to improve the teaching of mathematics. We observed several mathematics lessons in key stage 2, and we talked to pupils and examined their work. Teachers and teaching assistants are now well informed about what pupils can do. As a result, they set tasks that were appropriately challenging. During lessons, teachers and teaching assistants accurately assessed how well pupils understood the mathematics that they were set and ensured that pupils moved on to increasingly challenging tasks when ready.
- We saw that pupils were still demonstrating some gaps in understanding in mathematics. Pupils lacked fluency in topics that they had covered in previous years. Your current data confirms that progress in mathematics is still inconsistent. As a result, the progress of pupils currently near the end of key stage 2 is likely to be poor unless gaps in their prior learning are filled.
- Leaders, including governors, have been rightly concerned about the high percentage of pupils who are persistently absent. Persistent absence in the school has been higher than the national percentage for three consecutive years. You increased the resources focused on improving attendance. Your attendance leaders have employed all the deterrents available to persuade parents to ensure that their children attend school when possible.
- You have set up reward systems for pupils that encourage high attendance and

have designed the curriculum to be engaging and enjoyable. Pupils I spoke with enjoyed coming to school and the large majority of pupils I saw in lessons were enthusiastic and working hard.

- Attendance leaders strive to help pupils attend school whenever they can. Persistent absence has reduced. Leaders know and understand the varied circumstances that families in the community face. There are genuine reasons why some children have been unable to attend school for extended periods. When unavoidable absence is considered, the remaining persistent absence is in line with the national percentage.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- The gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding in reading and mathematics in key stage 2 are filled so that they will have made good progress by the end of the key stage.

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Worrall  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the acting deputy headteacher. I also met with the mathematics subject leader, the chair and vice-chair of governors, and with four members of staff, including newly qualified teachers. In addition, I met with the two attendance leaders. I held a telephone conversation with the school's local authority adviser. I scrutinised a range of documents, including those relating to pupils' progress, the school's improvement planning, self-evaluation and documents relating to attendance and safeguarding. I visited all key stages with you to see the learning that was taking place and observed groups of key stage 2 pupils learning mathematics and reading. I spoke with pupils informally in classes and at breaktime. I looked at work in pupils' books. I listened to a group of pupils from Years 5 and 6 read. I took account of the views of 33 parents through responses to the Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and three letters that were delivered to the school. I also took account of the 17 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.