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Mrs Denise Woodgate
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Woodgate

Short inspection of Bolham Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 December 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 May 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Alongside governors and a strong team of committed staff, you have ensured that the 'Bolham family' are a happy, thriving community. Morale among the staff is high. They feel well supported and as a result, share your high aspirations for pupils.

You have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and demonstrate this within your own high teaching commitment. As a result, the school continues to improve. Pupils have a strong appetite for learning. They enjoy coming to school, as can be seen in pupils' high attendance, in excess of the national average. One parent's comment, typical of many stated, 'I feel Bolham has provided my child with a fabulous start on life, encouraging confidence and the ability to question and enquire.'

Leaders have made good progress towards tackling the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. You were asked to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' progress by ensuring that the activities that teachers plan provide sufficient challenge for pupils. Teachers plan work that helps pupils to think more deeply about their learning. Small cohorts of children make national comparisons inappropriate. However, over time, a greater proportion of pupils are reaching the expected standards for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. In addition, a greater proportion of pupils reach the higher standards by the time they leave the school.

You are not complacent about the school's success. In the past, you have been disappointed with the teaching of phonics in the school. You implemented a new

approach and in 2018 every pupil met the expected standard. You recognise that there is still more work to do to ensure that children in the early years make strong progress in writing and number.

At the previous inspection, you were also asked to ensure that pupils in Years 5 and 6 improve their writing in subjects other than English. You made this a whole-school priority and have been successful in achieving this. Teachers provide pupils with many opportunities to write for a real purpose across various subjects. Our joint scrutiny of pupils' work confirmed that the standard of writing is equally strong in science as it is in English.

The school's provision is particularly strong in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects. The school regularly welcomes visitors from industry to help pupils gain an insight into possible future careers. In addition, pupils write letters to companies to gain sponsorship for their projects. Pupils have recently purchased a 3D printer from funds raised. Pupils apply their mathematical knowledge well to plan and design their fast cars. In 2017, the school was a national finalist in the 'Jaguar Challenge'.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, your staff and your governing body give the safety of pupils the highest priority. For example, when carrying out a risk assessment for a school residential, you had concerns about the site and postponed the trip until you were satisfied that it was safe to take pupils. You are diligent when recruiting staff, ensuring that appropriate vetting checks are made. You make sure that staff have regular and effective training and that all staff are confident in using the school's systems to report concerns.

Leaders keep a close eye on the welfare of pupils. You and your team go to great lengths to ensure that pupils and their families get the help and support they need. Leaders' close work with families and external agencies is particularly effective.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school because they are well looked after. Pupils confidently explain the school's procedures for evacuation in the event of a fire. They understand how to keep safe online. Experiences such as the 'Exmoor Challenge' ensure that pupils learn about how to keep safe in their local environment. Parents and pupils are confident that staff will listen and respond to any worries they may have.

Inspection findings

- We explored the effectiveness of support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). In the past, there have been a few children identified as receiving 'SEN support' that have not reached the standards expected for their age. Pupils experience a strong nurturing approach from staff. As a result, pupils' emotional and social development is significant.
- The school's leader for special educational needs (SENCo) has a very good knowledge of the needs of the pupils and their families. She is proactive in

accessing support from a range of different agencies and helps teachers to follow the advice successfully. Consequently, those pupils who have the most complex needs receive the support they need to thrive both academically and emotionally.

- However, the support for other pupils with less specific needs is more variable. Sometimes, plans lack the detail needed to support pupils in overcoming barriers to their learning. Your leadership team are in the process of developing more thorough systems for checking on the progress that pupils who receive additional interventions make so that they better match activities to pupils' needs. Pupils benefit from effective small-group work with teachers and teaching assistants. However, although the nurturing side of provision is strong, the academic progress that these pupils make is not yet consistently well targeted.
- We also focused on the quality of provision in the early years. Children enjoy school and are keen to play and take part in activities. They are eager and attentive and sustain their concentration on activities that engage them. They interact well with each other and with staff. However, few children from year to year exceed a good level of development in the early years. Given that most children join the school with skills at least typical for their age, you recognise that children could make better progress. Children get off to a strong start in their reading development. Consequently, more children go on to read fluently with a good level of understanding early on. However, children's understanding in mathematics and their ability to write well is less marked.
- Finally, we looked into the effectiveness of the governing body in holding senior leaders to account. Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and relative weaknesses. They gain precise information about progress towards school improvement priorities through their regular visits to school. For example, governors do everything possible to assure themselves that the split Year 1 pupils make good progress whichever class they are in. Governors use the information they gain wisely to challenge leaders and to redirect resources where necessary.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the early years provision is strengthened so that more children receive the challenge they need to make stronger progress in mathematics and writing
- pupils who are identified as requiring additional support make the gains needed to reach the expected standards for their age.

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

Tracy Hannon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and members of your staff. I spoke with the school's SENCo and leaders of English and mathematics. I also held a telephone conversation with a local authority representative. Before school, I was able to talk with several parents as they accompanied their children to school. You and I visited all classrooms at least once to see the learning that was taking place. We looked at examples of pupils' work in their books. In particular, work in English and topic books were scrutinised.

A range of documentation was considered, including the single central record, the school's self-evaluation, the development plan and the school's own assessment information relating to pupils' past and current progress. The SENCo and I scrutinised pupils' individual education plans and their associated work. I took account of 15 parental responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and parents' free-texts. I also took account of the anonymised staff and pupil questionnaire responses.