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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Jane Gascoigne
Headteacher
Combe Down CofE Primary School
Church Road
Combe Down
Bath
Somerset
BA2 5JQ

Dear Mrs Gascoigne

Short inspection of Combe Down CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 March 2019, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in September 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection.

When you joined the school a year ago, you swiftly identified the main priorities. You elicited the help of other leaders in the Palladian Academy Trust and an external consultant to improve leadership and teaching. This is paying dividends. Leadership is now more widely distributed so that leaders at all levels have greater accountability for evaluating teaching. Leaders work closely with teachers and intervene when pupils need additional pastoral and academic support. This ensures that most pupils achieve well, and it is beginning to improve outcomes for pupils with previously variable progress. However, in recent months, there have been some unavoidable long-term absences, including your own, as well as changes of staff. As a result, leaders' actions have not yet gathered sufficient momentum to have a sustained impact on outcomes for children in the early years, disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Good teaching over time ensures that most pupils achieve well at the end of key stages 1 and 2. In the past, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development in the early years has been below average. However, as a result of improvements to teaching, most children currently in the early years are making good progress, particularly in reading and writing.

Reviews of current pupils' learning in all year groups and your latest assessment information confirm that a large proportion of pupils are making good progress in all subjects. However, teaching does not consistently challenge pupils to achieve as well as they should, particularly in writing.

Pastoral provision is a strength of the school. Many pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND, benefit from well-planned emotional, social and behavioural support. This is improving pupils' confidence and helping them to develop a positive mindset in their learning. Additional teaching is enabling pupils to make better academic progress than previously. However, this is not yet consistent.

Governors have a good overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses because they are proactive in checking the school's work for themselves. They work closely with trustees in the Palladian Academy Trust to share their evaluations of the school's effectiveness. However, governors do not consistently identify specifically which aspects of teaching need improving in order to enable pupils to achieve their full potential. Governors and trustees successfully secured interim leadership during your recent absence, mitigating disruption for pupils and staff.

The majority of parents and carers are happy with the support that the school provides for their children. They typically comment, 'This is a fantastic school with wonderful and dedicated teachers' and, 'We are blessed with an excellent headteacher and staff who put children and families at the heart of all they do.' A minority of parents have concerns about communication and leaders' responses to their worries.

Pupils are valuable ambassadors for the school and welcome visitors politely. Pupils are happy and sociable and talk enthusiastically about their learning. For example, a Year 4 pupil proudly showed me the bright and interesting rainforest display in the classroom. Pupils who spoke to me during the inspection agreed wholeheartedly that adults help them, and confirm that their school is a fun place in which to learn.

Safeguarding is effective.

You prioritise the safety and well-being of all pupils. Pupils, parents and staff agree that pupils are safe in school and say that behaviour is good. The majority of pupils attend school regularly. Governors actively support leaders to review safeguarding. For example, they routinely check attendance, the school's single central record and staff training records. They also help to carry out health and safety audits.

Staff understand how to keep pupils safe in different situations because you provide them with relevant updates to training. Adults are well aware of their responsibilities and can clearly explain how to refer concerns. You maintain thorough safeguarding records and seek appropriate support when pupils need specialist help. You consistently follow up your actions to check their impact. You undertake the necessary checks to ensure that all adults working in the school are safe to work with children. You meticulously record these details on the single central record.

Inspection findings

- We agreed that my first line of enquiry would check how well leaders are improving teaching in the early years, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. This is because, over time, the proportion of children achieving well in these subjects has been below average. Children in the early years listen carefully and behave well because they are keen to learn. Our reviews of children's learning and your latest assessment information confirm that most children are making good progress, particularly in reading and writing. However, children do not have sufficient opportunities to practise, and therefore secure, their written calculations in mathematics. On occasions, teachers do not plan activities that take into account what children already know, understand and can do. This hinders children from achieving what they are capable of.
- My second line of enquiry was to check how well extra help enables pupils to catch up, particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. This is because, in the past, these pupils have not routinely achieved well. The deputy headteacher and the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) have worked tirelessly, and with great enthusiasm, to support pupils' emotional, mental and social development. Precisely focused pastoral support has been instrumental in developing pupils' self-esteem and confidence, which is enabling them to engage positively in their learning. Parents praise the school's holistic approach to meeting their children's needs, typically commenting, 'Staff really care about their pupils' and, 'The school goes above and beyond to get specialist help for pupils.' Pupils also testify to the positive impact of the extra help they receive, with comments such as 'I like learning in the Hub because it helps me to concentrate' and, 'Adults help me to calm down when I feel angry.'
- Adults are deployed well to provide pupils with additional teaching support. They model learning carefully and ask appropriate questions to clarify pupils' understanding. This enables pupils to consolidate and apply their skills to future learning. For example, Year 3 pupils learn to partition two-digit numbers to secure their understanding of place value. Pupils can explain their understanding and apply this skill to add two- and three-digit numbers. Reviews of pupils' learning and the school's latest assessment information confirm that disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND are making better progress than they did before. However, this progress is not yet consistently strong.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they improve teaching in the early years, particularly in mathematics, so that children are well supported to make the best progress of which they are capable
- precisely focused support for pupils who need to make stronger progress, particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND, consistently enables them to achieve their full potential, especially in writing.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Bath and Wells, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bath and North East Somerset Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Beeks
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the acting deputy headteacher. I also met with the SENCo and the mathematics subject leader. I held separate meetings with a group of governors and the chief executive officer of the Palladian Academy Trust. I checked the school's single central record and we discussed your safeguarding procedures. We reviewed the school's latest assessment information and discussed the school's self-evaluation and development priorities. Together, we observed a range of learning interventions for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND in several year groups. We also reviewed children's learning in both classes in the early years. We reviewed a range of learning in pupils' books. I spoke with several pupils at breaktime to gain their views of the school. I also spoke with pupils in lessons. I held informal discussions with several parents at the beginning of the school day. I also considered 135 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, along with 82 additional free-text comments. I took account of 42 responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff.