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Mrs Sarah Sanson
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Sanson

Short inspection of Polruan Primary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 18 June 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 March 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, 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.**

In recent years, demographic changes in the local area have substantially reduced the number of pupils seeking entry to the school. This change has also resulted in an increased proportion of pupils joining and leaving the school other than at the usual time. This means that the school is now catering for a more socially and educationally diverse community than it has in the past.

Since the school became an academy and joined the Bridge Schools Trust in 2016, your evaluations of the quality of the school's work have taken careful note of pupils' different needs. With other school and trust leaders, you have accurately identified the correct priorities for improvement. At times, though, your determined efforts to improve the school have been constrained by difficulties in recruiting staff, including school leaders.

You and your head of school provide effective guidance and professional development opportunities for staff. As a result, teaching continues to improve, but there is still some inconsistency. Teachers plan work and provide support that meet the needs of most pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, they are less successful in meeting the needs of the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged. This is particularly the case in writing and, although improving, still in mathematics.

Currently, stability in leadership and staffing has strengthened your ability to bring about the desired improvement in teaching and pupils' learning. However, this has not yet been sustained long enough to ensure that all pupils achieve their full potential. Nevertheless, the school is an inclusive and welcoming place. You and your staff provide good pastoral support for the pupils and promote encouraging relationships. As a result, pupils respect adults and feel safe and valued. They say, 'We are all good friends here.' Pupils' general behaviour has improved and is now good. Most pupils are also improving their attitudes to learning and are showing more confidence and interest in their work. However, some pupils, because of slowed learning in the past, are still over-reliant on adult support and lose concentration on their work when not directly supported by an adult. When this happens, progress slows.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders in the school, supported by colleagues across the academy, sustain a strong safeguarding culture. Staff know pupils well. They maintain a diligent, watchful eye that keeps pupils' well-being and safety at the heart of the school's work. Safeguarding policies and procedures are fit for purpose. Pre-employment checks to ensure the suitability of staff are fully in place.

Staff receive regular training and are aware of their responsibilities to safeguard pupils. For example, they are clear about the actions they should take if a pupil discloses concerns about their safety.

Pupils are overwhelmingly positive and enjoy coming to school. They are proud to be a part of this small community. Pupils say there is always an adult to talk to if they are worried. They told me that 'People care about each other at this school.' Pupils show a good understanding of how to stay safe. This is especially evident in the way older pupils show genuine care and consideration when playing with younger pupils at breaktimes. Parents and carers, too, appreciate the warm and nurturing environment of the school. As one parent commented, 'Lovely school with a real family feel to it; everyone is important and well looked after as well as being supported with their work.'

Inspection findings

- The first line of enquiry examined the effectiveness of actions to raise attainment and progress in writing and mathematics across key stage 2. In particular, actions to increase the proportion of pupils attaining higher standards. During my visits to lessons, and while looking in the pupils' books, I saw that most pupils are improving their progress. Some pupils are increasingly catching up and bridging gaps in past learning, whereas a small number still find sustaining concentration difficult. At times, the latter is evident in the small amount of often unfinished work in pupils' books. I also noted the limited development of the pupils' mathematical skills in other subjects.
- In recent terms, you have provided additional staff training and guidance and

have strengthened the accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils' developing skills and progress. Staff are positive about these checks. They are using them with increasing success to identify and teach the next steps that pupils need to make. Observations of mathematics lessons in the school show that pupils make good use of learning resources, such as counting aids and protractors, during meaningful practical activities. Work in pupils' mathematics books shows that most pupils practise their calculation skills well. Over the course of this academic year, work also shows that pupils are making progress by tackling relevant problem-solving activities and beginning to explain their answers. However, some activities in class and tasks in books are not sufficiently challenging for the most able pupils and do not stretch their thinking.

- Pupils' written work in English and across other subjects shows improvement this academic year. Pupils' writing shows strengthened ability in writing meaningful, descriptive sentences. Pupils' enthusiasm in writing is noticeably at its best when they write imaginatively, construct their own stories or recount interesting historical events in their own words. However, weaknesses in handwriting and spelling skills reflect inconsistency over time in teachers' and pupils' expectations. In particular, weakness in these skills inhibits the most able pupils from writing at the higher standard.
- The second line of enquiry evaluated the school's use of the pupil premium to advance the learning of disadvantaged pupils. You plan the management and use of the additional funds that the school receives for pupils who are disadvantaged effectively. Your plans accurately identify particular barriers to pupils' learning, such as social and emotional needs. Teachers are now meeting pupils' different needs and abilities more specifically through extra, precisely targeted teaching. You have also improved the attendance of disadvantaged pupils so they can take full advantage of this additional support. These developments are helping more disadvantaged pupils to make better progress.
- Next, I examined the work of leaders in raising attendance and reducing persistent absence. Your close partnership working with the head of school and with academy leaders, and increasingly with parents, has overcome the fall in attendance evident last year. In particular, you have rigorously and swiftly reduced and almost halved the rate of persistent absence through letters to parents and by enlisting the help of the family support worker. Your efforts to promote and celebrate pupils' good attendance have also proved successful. As a result, the pupils' current rate of attendance broadly matches that found nationally and reflects the pupils' increasing enjoyment in learning.
- Finally, I considered the effectiveness of the teaching of phonics. You have provided training and have supported teachers in adapting the way they teach phonics. For example, children in their Reception Year and their classmates in Years 1 and 2 now benefit from teaching that is matched to their ability rather than their age. This is enabling the teacher to challenge pupils at the right level and develop their phonics understanding more effectively. From an early age, children confidently pronounce initial letter sounds correctly in response to the teacher's accurate modelling of new letter combinations and words. As a result, within the very small year groups, more pupils are developing the phonics skills expected for their age. This is having a beneficial influence on their reading skills,

as seen, for example, when pupils in Year 2 capably completed their reading comprehension tasks.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- consistently effective teaching of writing and increased challenge and expectations of pupils' engagement in learning secure good achievement and enable a higher proportion of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, to exceed expected standards for their age
- teachers further improve pupils' mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills and strengthen their use and development across the range of subjects so that more achieve higher standards by the end of key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Alexander Baxter
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with school leaders, including local governors, and with representatives of the multi-academy trust. I visited classrooms with the head of school and collected and scrutinised samples of pupils' work in books. I talked with individual pupils during breaktimes and visits to classrooms and observed them reading and checking their work. I checked a range of documents relating to safeguarding with you, the head of school and your administrative staff. We also examined details of pupils' progress, the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans and reviews of the effectiveness of the school completed by the Bridge Schools Trust. I took account of one written comment from a parent. I talked informally with two parents as they brought their children to school and held a telephone conversation with another parent.