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Mrs Helen MacGregor
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Dear Mrs MacGregor

Short inspection of West Buckland Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 February 2017, 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

Throughout the day of the inspection, it was clear that the school is a harmonious community where pupils are keen to learn. Pupils give of their best in lessons and their workbooks show the care that they take in subjects across the curriculum. Pupils and parents remarked how teachers make learning fun. Parents recognise that, despite the school being small, the opportunities you give to pupils to learn within and beyond school are wide.

You and your leaders have an accurate understanding of why the school is successful and you plan effectively to bring about further improvements. As a result, you have significantly raised standards in many areas of the school's work since the previous inspection. Children get off to a good start to their education in the Reception and Year 1 class. The proportion of children reaching or exceeding expected standards has risen year on year and is well above average.

Following the previous inspection, you strengthened teaching and pupils are given frequent opportunities to discuss and reflect on their learning with their teachers and classmates.

Across the school, the teaching of reading is particularly effective. Pupils securely gain phonic knowledge to help them at the earlier stages of reading and go on to become capable and enthusiastic readers. In the 2016 tests at the end of Year 6, all of the pupils reached at least the expected standard for their age in reading. Conversely, however, few of these same pupils reached the expected standard in writing and this meant that their progress in writing from Years 3 to 6 was not as strong. This was not the case for pupils at the end of Year 2, where achievement in reading and writing was more evenly matched.

You have responded by improving teaching and assessment in writing since the 2016 tests and, particularly for the most able pupils, progress is now rapid. However, your own checks on pupils' work has identified that middle-ability pupils are not yet making as rapid progress towards the expected level by the end of Year 6.

This academic year, you and your mathematics leader developed teaching and the mathematics curriculum to take account of new and higher expectations. Again, in 2016, the impact on pupils' progress and standards was more consistent at the end of Year 2 than by the end of Year 6. Now, however, the curriculum is established across the school and teachers are challenging pupils more successfully, whatever their starting points.

Pupils learn well across the curriculum, but you are aware that standards in science at the end of Year 6 last year did not represent strong progress for that group of pupils.

Governors now use the sharp information you give them about pupils' progress to check that plans are effective. This means that they have a clearer picture of pupils' achievement than they had at the previous inspection. Governors plan well to use additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and, across the school, historically and now, this group of pupils achieves well.

The school is an inclusive community. Increasingly, through projects such as Diversity Week, you are extending pupils' knowledge of people's lives beyond their own community. In turn, this is building strong values of respect for all. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well and they go on to make good progress during their time in the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that the culture of safeguarding is strong. I saw evidence that all staff are vigilant and alert to a wide range of indicators of concern. They confidently use the school's systems to report concerns. This is because of a prompt and rigorous induction process for staff where you set out your expectations of conduct in respect of all aspects of safeguarding.

You follow up induction with regular and wide training, including on how to act if pupils are at risk of radicalisation. In discussion with you and through reviews of your well-kept records, I can see that you report any concerns about pupils promptly to the appropriate services. If the response of that service is not timely, you persist until you are confident that a pupil is safe.

When recruiting staff, you make and record all checks on their suitability to work with children, in line with current guidance. Your records are comprehensive and governors check them regularly.

Pupils feel exceptionally safe and say that any concerns they post into the 'worry box', however small, will be dealt with promptly and effectively. They told me how they were learning to be a 'telling school' and never to be a bystander if there was anything which concerned them.

Leaders and governors have adopted the guidance in the current statutory documentation for keeping children safe but they have not yet updated the school's safeguarding policy. Additionally, while you are trained at the correct level for your role as designated safeguarding leader, you know that you need to update this training immediately.

Inspection findings

- One of the lines of enquiry that I followed on this inspection concerned the progress of pupils in writing across Years 3 to 6. The steps you have taken to improve their progress are having a positive effect. Pupils now develop their ideas more fully and use precise and accurate vocabulary when they write explanation texts in history and science. The standard of spelling has improved.
- Teachers have broadened the scope of pupils' writing. The school's recent promotion of imaginative writing has been effective. For example, in Year 6, pupils include sharp dialogue and create tension through using different sentence structures when writing adventure stories.
- The greatest impact of the school's improvement plans can be seen in the writing of the most able pupils. Current assessment information shows that more are writing at greater depth.
- The gap between standards in reading and writing for middle-ability pupils still exists in too many cases. Teachers are not developing pupils' grammatical writing skills systematically and therefore cannot rapidly identify and address gaps in these pupils' skills.
- The assessment of pupils' writing skills is accurate. Leaders routinely meet with teachers to check on the progress of individual pupils and groups of pupils. Middle-ability pupils are targeted for extra support but leaders do not then make frequent enough checks on pupils' work to see whether this support is hastening pupils' progress towards the expected standard.

- The second key line of enquiry related to mathematics and particularly to challenge for the most able pupils. Actions taken by leaders have successfully supported pupils effectively to deepen their mathematical learning. More pupils are now working at a greater depth in mathematics. Pupils regularly practise calculation skills and pupils of all levels of ability are supported to tackle investigations. The rate of progress in mathematics, as seen in workbooks, is rapid. Most-able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, relish the challenges they are set. They show resilience and persistence with new work.
- Pupils regularly apply their calculation skills to problem solving and to reasoning mathematically. A pupil described this as having to answer questions, prove the answer and then explain the answer. Pupils are increasingly using precise mathematical language in their explanations.
- The third key line of enquiry concerned the progress pupils make in science. Leaders have become aware that pupils are not developing the skills of scientific enquiry as securely as their scientific knowledge. This was borne out in the inspection through an examination of pupils' workbooks.
- In lessons, pupils write frequently to explain their scientific understanding. However, opportunities for pupils to work scientifically, record findings and draw conclusions are not well developed. For example, pupils do not move beyond displaying results in simple charts and tables. This limits pupils' chances of reaching the expected level in science for their age.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress in writing, across Years 3 to 6, continues to improve so that the standards reached by middle-ability pupils in particular more closely match their high attainment in reading
- the curriculum and teaching in science ensure that pupils develop their skills of scientific enquiry.

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

Yours sincerely

Wendy Marriott
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, and informally with other school staff. Together we agreed on the lines of enquiry. I also met with three governors, including the chair of the governing body, and reviewed the minutes of the governing body's meetings. I spoke to a representative group of pupils and also spoke informally to pupils in their lessons and in the playground. I looked at the responses to the Parent View survey and the survey of the staff team's views. We visited lessons together and I looked at a selection of work in pupils' writing books, mathematics books and science books. I took account of the school's improvement plans and a range of policies. I discussed pupils' current standards of attainment and rates of progress as you presented them to me through your own records.