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Mr Richard Briar
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Dear Mr Briar

Short inspection of Ashcott Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 March 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 November 2013.

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.**

You facilitate a strong collegial approach that ensures that staff work together well. You have gained the respect of staff and so when you identify aspects that require development all staff join in the drive to improve the school further. For example, you recognised the shortfall in standards achieved in mathematics at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2 last year. Your work to improve the teaching of mathematics is paying off. Teachers' skills and knowledge of the mathematics curriculum are now good. Pupils are expected to explain their understanding of mathematical concepts and go beyond fluency and accuracy in calculation. As a result, pupils' ability to solve problems and reason is improving quickly. Your work in this area is proving effective.

At the last inspection you were asked to ensure that the most able pupils in English have every opportunity to produce high-quality work so that more pupils exceed the standards that are expected nationally. Your work has been successful in this regard. The proportion of pupils who exceed the standards expected nationally in reading and writing, by the end of key stage 2, has been at least in line with the national average for the last two years. However, the proportion of pupils who reach the expected standard in reading at the end of key stage 2, has, for two years, been lower than that seen nationally.

Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and are keen to do their best. They show enthusiasm for the innovative systems such as 'reading stars' that you have instigated to get younger and older pupils reading together. Pupils also enjoy the 'book club' in Years 4, 5 and 6, which enables them to explore the texts they read with other pupils from local schools. These initiatives ensure that many pupils have a love of reading for pleasure.

Parents are very supportive of the school. Almost every parent who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, reported that they would recommend it. They value the efforts you make to ensure their children settle at 'big school' quickly. A good example is 'getting ready for school backpacks'. These resources support children and their families to develop some core skills prior to starting school. As a result, children's transition into the Reception Year is swift and children settle quickly.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding here. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are testament to the school's approach, detailed and of high quality. Staff training is up to date and in line with requirements. Staff use and apply their training in their daily work well. Staff know how to refer concerns to staff who have designated responsibilities for safeguarding. Leaders work closely with external agencies to ensure they are reducing pupils' risk of harm. They do not shy away from escalating concerns to higher levels to ensure that pupils get the support they need.

You complete checks on all staff before they join the school. The single central record is meticulously kept up to date and governors check it regularly.

Pupils say they feel safe. They value the family feel of the school and say that everyone 'looks out for each other'. Pupils are confident that they can go to staff with concerns and that they will sort them out quickly. Pupils say that the curriculum on offer educates them about how to keep safe on the internet.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry focused on the impact of leaders' actions to ensure that phonics teaching supports pupils to use and apply their skills in phonics so that they read with the level of accuracy expected for their age. This is because the proportion of pupils meeting the required standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has been below the national average for the last three years.
- The teaching of phonics is regular and systematic. However, it is not yet enabling some middle- and low-attaining pupils in key stage 1 to keep up or catch up with the standards expected nationally. Some pupils, particularly those who are low- and middle-attaining, in Years 1 and 2, do not yet demonstrate secure application of some key Year 1 sounds when reading independently. Senior and middle leaders' checks on the quality of phonics teaching are not thorough and so do not identify and tackle quickly enough the slower rates of pupils' progress.

- My next line of enquiry looked at how well teaching supports pupils to make consistently good progress in writing. In 2017, the proportion of pupils who met the required standards in spelling, punctuation and grammar assessment, at the end of key stage 2, was below the national average. Pupils' achievement in writing was also below that seen nationally at the end of key stage 1.
- The whole-school strategy to improve pupils' use of complex punctuation in key stage 2 is paying off. Increasingly, pupils can use and apply a variety of punctuation, sentence structures and powerful vocabulary to add interest and detail to their writing in upper key stage 2. A strength is the way in which pupils plan to use punctuation and assess their own writing and that of their peers. Pupils enjoy using their 'purple polishing pens' to edit and improve their work. However, weaknesses in pupils' spelling remain in some classes further down the school. This is because pupils do not use and apply their phonics skills consistently well to spell accurately. The school's strategy for editing and improving writing is not yet consistent at key stage 1. Therefore, while pupils' stamina to write is improving, pupils' variable spelling and inaccuracies in punctuation prevent some middle- and low-attaining pupils from writing with the accuracy expected for their age.
- Finally, I reviewed the impact of the leadership systems in the school to raise pupils' progress and achievement. This is because, in the recent past, pupils' progress has been inconsistent for some groups of pupils. Whole-school systems to track pupils' reading development are not checked by the wider leadership team. Consequently, key leaders in the school do not have an up-to-date understanding of pupils' reading development. By contrast, leaders' checks of mathematics teaching and pupils' workbooks have strengthened teaching this year. Pupils use and apply their mathematical skills well to solve problems and reason in mathematics.
- Governors require that you give them detailed information about the progress of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This enables governors to keep a close eye on the impact of additional funding for these pupils and the progress these pupils make. However, you do not provide governors with information about how well each year group is progressing. This makes it difficult for them to hold you to account with sufficient rigour for ensuring that each year group makes consistently strong progress over time. As a result, some relative weaknesses in the school's performance remain. Leaders and governors do not use published performance information as precisely as they could to set targets for improvement and to check pupils' progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils use and apply their knowledge and understanding of phonics to read and spell accurately in key stage 1 and lower key stage 2

- governors receive the information they need so that they can set precise targets for improvement and hold leaders to account for pupils' progress in each year group, and for groups of pupils, in reading, writing and mathematics
- their checks on teaching, pupils' progress, and teachers' assessments in reading are thorough, and ensure that lower-attaining pupils and middle-attaining pupils who have previously underachieved catch up.

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

Julie Carrington
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spoke with you, other school leaders, and four governors. I had a telephone discussion with a representative from Somerset local authority. We made visits to lessons to observe pupils' learning and to scrutinise their work. I met with a group of pupils to hear them read and ask them about their views of the school.

I considered a range of documentary evidence, which included the school's self-evaluation, development plans and school performance information. I also looked at monitoring records for teaching, learning and assessment; your analysis of pupils' attendance; and safeguarding documentation.

In addition, I took account of 36 responses to the Parent View online survey and the free-text messaging service. I gathered the views of staff through discussions during the inspection and reviewed the online staff survey.