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Mrs Julie Hogan
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Dear Mrs Hogan

Short inspection of Paulton Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 16 June 2016, 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 February 2011.

This school continues to be good.

You and other leaders and managers accurately judge the school to be providing a good-quality education. Since your arrival in January 2015, it is evident that you have steadily driven school improvement and tackled weaknesses in teaching and learning. You admit that this has led to a high staff turnover but you and your governors are confident that the school is now in the right place to continue to improve.

At the time of the last inspection, the school was asked to make sure that children in Reception made the progress they were capable of. Since then, a new year group leader has made substantial improvements to the early years environment and this has accelerated the progress that children make. They confidently access a wide range of interesting resources which stimulate their thinking, develop their key skills and support learning. You and your teaching staff identified the need to develop the children's personal, social and emotional development. By making effective use of the outdoor learning areas to support the children's learning and develop their confidence, you and your team have made a significant impact on their improving skills.

The last inspection highlighted the need for teaching staff to play a more active part in collecting information on pupils' progress and use it to inform their practice. You have ensured that teaching staff take responsibility for pupils' progress information. You have helped them develop an accurate understanding of the progress their pupils are making and how to compare it with the expected levels for the age year

group they teach. Regular reviews of the progress made by individual pupils help teaching staff tailor their teaching to ensure that specific needs are met. Those who require extra challenge or help are supported by teaching assistants. This has had a strong impact on accelerating the progress that children in Reception and Year 1 make. However, as a result of poor teaching in the past, the gap in the current Year 2 cohort between those pupils who are disadvantaged and those who are not remains significant.

You have established a leadership structure with clear lines of accountability. Year group leaders take responsibility for their teams and play an effective role in the strategic leadership and management of the school. Through their regular sampling of books and learning walks around the school, they check for consistency in teaching and learning. The deputy headteacher and year group leaders support members of their team in ensuring that all classrooms are stimulating and encourage pupils to systematically develop key skills. Nevertheless, there still remains an inconsistency in the way that the agreed marking policy is used. This is because not all teachers make meaningful comments which are understood by pupils.

The special educational needs leader has a firm handle on the provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability, ensuring that they are well supported both in small groups and during class sessions. Improved links with the neighbouring junior school and specialist advice from the local special school have enabled best practice to be shared. A consistent approach to planning for specific and specialist needs across the school has led to improved planning for pupils who have special educational needs or disability. Group and individual sessions are targeted well to ensure that the pupils receive the best possible support.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your team have created a strong culture of safeguarding within the school. You all get to know the families of children who attend Paulton Infant School very well and a close eye is kept on every pupil, especially any whose circumstances make them vulnerable. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed. Policies and procedures are kept up to date and strictly adhered to. All staff are well trained and any concerns are always immediately followed up by you or your deputy headteacher in your roles as designated child protection officers. You have built up close professional relationships with external agencies, such as social services, and staff make good use of specialist help and advice.

You and your governors understand how to recruit safely and staff are carefully vetted prior to employment. Governors are focused on ensuring that the school building is a safe place to be, and regularly carry out rigorous health and safety checks. You do have some incidents of challenging behaviour but these are carefully logged, followed through and checked to make sure that there are no emerging patterns of concern. Since you took up your appointment, antisocial incidents have steadily declined and pupils' anxieties have diminished. Teaching staff appreciate the additional training they have received to handle pupils with extreme behaviours.

You, your staff and governors have all attended training on the government's approach to the prevention of extremism and radicalisation.

Parents reported on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, that they feel their children are kept safe in school. Pupils spoken to during the inspection explained that they feel safe and know whom they could approach if they were worried or concerned. They have an appropriate understanding for their age of e-safety and other potential risks such as 'stranger danger'.

Inspection findings

- Outcomes in the current Reception cohort have improved with more children than previously meeting the early learning goals for this age group. There has been a significant improvement in the outcomes of disadvantaged Reception children who have all achieved their age-related expectations. You explain that the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children in Reception has closed because of the way in which staff across the school have worked very closely with the parent support adviser to support those families who are faced with challenges in their home life. The ways in which the teaching staff have developed strong links between home and school are evident in the success of the 'stay and play', 'stay and read', and 'stay and count' sessions where parents work alongside their children. The strong emphasis on helping the children to speak clearly and listen carefully has also had a strong impact on improving the outcomes for the youngest children.
- Last year you were disappointed with the results of the Year 1 phonics check (the sounds that letters make). In particular, you noted the significant gap between those pupils who were disadvantaged and receive additional funding and those who did not. However, you wasted no time in carrying out an audit of the teachers' phonics skills and rapidly put training in place to tackle any gaps in skills and develop their confidence. Those pupils who were most at risk of not meeting age-related expectations were taught by your most skilful teachers. You have made sure that parents have a better understanding of the teaching of sounds by running a workshop and providing them with a helpful pack of information to support learning at home. As a result, outcomes in the most recent Year 1 phonics check have improved. All pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, have made good progress and most have achieved age-related expectations.
- In last year's national test for Year 2, pupils achieved broadly average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. In mathematics, there was no gap between those pupils who were disadvantaged and those who were not. However, there was a slight gap in reading and a more significant one in writing.

- Following a period of weak and unstable teaching and learning as Year 1 pupils, current Year 2 have made accelerated progress. The most vulnerable pupils have been given extra help and their progress has been regularly checked. However, information from the most recent test results and teachers' assessments indicates that a significant minority of pupils in the current Year 2, especially those who are disadvantaged, will not meet age-related expectations.
- In contrast, most-able pupils are doing better than their peers in school. You explained that this is because, following professional development undertaken by the teaching staff, there is a greater focus on helping pupils to think more deeply about their learning. They are encouraged to explore and investigate for themselves. The most able pupils show a high level of engagement in the topics they are learning about.
- During my visit, we looked at a number of writing books and agreed that the presentation of pupils' writing needs to improve. Not all pupils write at length and many of their letters are inconsistently formed.
- Pupils enjoy their learning and fully involve themselves in their tasks, and classrooms have a positive buzz. Your strong focus on using the outdoors as a learning resource is having an impressive impact on those pupils who find it difficult to form positive relationships with their peers and appropriately manage their emotions. During my visit, it was impressive to see how a group of vulnerable pupils had successfully made hot chocolate using an open fire in the school's 'forest area'. Not only did they learn basic fire-making skills, they worked cooperatively together and showed real pride when they shared a delicious end result.
- Pupils have a clear understanding of the behaviour that is expected of them and talk confidently about the outdoor activities they undertake to help them 'build up their confidence and let out their anger'. Opportunities to elect class representatives for the school council, where they discuss 'how to make the school better', enable pupils to have an age-appropriate understanding of how to live in a democratic society.
- During the past academic year, a very small number of pupils did not attend the school regularly. You point out that these were isolated cases which were related to medical issues and these have been resolved. Procedures to follow up any absences are clear and rigorously adhered to. Specialist help is used to work with those families who find sending their children to school regularly a challenge.
- Most of the parents who completed Parent View responded positively. Their views can be summed up by one who reported that 'This is a fantastic school where my child is very happy... they treat each child as an individual and address their individual needs.' I discussed with you the small minority of negative comments received which were related to pupils' progress and communication. You agree that in the past teaching was not as good as it should have been and this affected the progress of some pupils. You have worked hard to improve communication between home and school and with the junior school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the gap in attainment between those pupils who are disadvantaged and those who are not is rapidly closed
- the school's marking policy is used consistently by teachers and any comments made by teachers are meaningful and understood by pupils
- pupils' outcomes in writing are improved and pupils are helped to write at length in a neat and legible style.

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

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and we discussed improvements since the last inspection. In particular, we discussed the improvements made to the school since you were appointed in January 2015. We also discussed your self-evaluation and the initiatives you were taking to further school improvement. I held discussions with five governors, including the chair of the governing body, and had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. I met with a group of pupils and spoke to others informally during lessons. You and I made a brief visit to all classes. We sampled the work in some of the pupils' books. I looked at the survey results from the 23 responses from Parent View and considered any concerns raised by parents. I also took into consideration the 36 responses from the pupils' online questionnaire and the 16 responses from the staff online questionnaire.