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Mr Andy Peterson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Peterson

Short inspection of Bitterne CE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 February 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 the school was judged to be good in March 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have created a friendly and inclusive atmosphere based on the school's values of 'love, trust, forgiveness'. These values underpin everything that happens within the school. Since the last inspection, there have been a number of staffing changes and many of the staff at your school are relatively new to teaching. Due to well-considered coaching and support systems, many of these teachers now undertake subject leadership and you are currently planning to further extend this training. You respond to the need for improvement or change swiftly and successfully with a 'can do' attitude. For example, following disappointing outcomes in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 in 2017, you were challenged by the local authority to improve mathematics teaching across the school. Assisted by senior leaders, you ably rose to the challenge, resulting in positive outcomes and increased rates of progress across all year groups.

Leaders and governors have an accurate view of what the school does well and what it could do even better. Governors are enthusiastic, well trained and are highly supportive of the school. They challenge school leaders regularly. Nearly all staff who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire said that they were proud to work at the school and that they are well led and managed. Parents and carers are also supportive of the school. One parent, echoing the views of a significant number of parents, reported: 'Bitterne school is a caring and loving environment that challenges our children to be the best they can be, not just academically but emotionally and socially.'

Pupils enjoy their school. They talk enthusiastically and confidently to visitors. They describe their teachers as 'friendly' and 'someone you can go to with your problems'. Pupils also welcome the wide range of responsibilities that they are given, such as being a buddy to a younger child or taking an active part in the Southampton Civic Award Scheme.

You have addressed the last inspection's recommendation to ensure that all pupils develop good handwriting and take pride in the presentation of their work. Daily handwriting sessions, insistence on the use of rulers when drawing straight lines and high expectations from all members of staff have had a positive impact. Work in books and displays around the school show that standards of presentation are generally high across the school. Where needed, extra support is given to some pupils who need assistance in developing their fine motor skills. The most recent Governors' Termly Award focused on handwriting. Examples of how pupils' presentation has improved since September are displayed around the school, providing additional motivation to pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have established a strong culture of safeguarding within the school. Meticulous safeguarding records are kept and are updated and checked regularly to ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You provide up-to-date, comprehensive training to all members of staff. As a result, staff are clear about what to do should they have any concerns.

Attendance is in line with the national average. Previously, the proportion of pupils who were persistently absent was above that found nationally. Leaders introduced measures to improve the attendance of these pupils. As a result, recent attendance figures show that the proportion of persistent absentees is now below the national average.

Pupils know what bullying is and say that it does happen occasionally at the school, but staff sort it out quickly. Pupils have a good understanding of e-safety. They understand the importance of keeping passwords safe and could give me examples of passwords that were not strong.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed to look at specific areas of the school's provision: the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements; the progress of disadvantaged pupils; the progress of the most able and most-able disadvantaged pupils, particularly in writing; and the breadth and balance of the curriculum.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils at your school has been steadily rising over the past few years. However, it remains slightly below the national average. Information from the end of key stage 2 in 2018 showed that disadvantaged pupils made strong progress from their starting points and were starting to narrow the difference between themselves and other pupils nationally. You know every individual pupil at your school well and ensure that their needs, both

emotional and educational, are met through carefully targeted teaching programmes and interventions where needed. School progress information, conversations with pupils and work in books seen during the inspection all show that most disadvantaged pupils at the school are making strong progress. School leaders recognise that more needs to be done and are working hard to ensure that the difference between these pupils and others nationally diminishes further.

- Many of the disadvantaged pupils at your school also have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The individual needs of these pupils are quickly identified, and appropriate programmes are put in place to support them. Effective support is delivered by highly trained teaching assistants. Progress is carefully tracked, and interventions adjusted if they are not having the desired impact. As a result, most pupils with SEND are making good progress from their various starting points.
- The attainment of your most-able pupils at the end of key stage 2 in 2018 was broadly in line with that found nationally in both reading and mathematics. It was, however, below in writing. As a result, you have rightly focused on the teaching of writing across the whole school. Leaders have re-evaluated and changed the approach to writing to ensure that there is a clear purpose for pupils to write and that it is relevant to them. During the inspection, Year 3 pupils were engrossed in writing clear instructions on how to make muffins, based on the previous day's cooking. This work linked to their healthy living topic. Work in books and on display showed similar high-quality writing across all year groups in a range of subjects. Most pupils across the school, including the most able, are now making stronger progress in writing. Work is ongoing to ensure that these pupils reach their full potential.
- Through careful planning and close monitoring, leaders ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced and that all subjects are given appropriate coverage. The progress of pupils across all subjects is also closely monitored and reported on annually. Leaders ensure that there is a rich curriculum on offer and that it is enhanced by trips to places of interest and visitors to the school. Pupils enjoy these visits and speak excitedly about them. For example, one group of pupils spoke to me about their visit to Fort Nelson and how they wrote letters home as if they had served in the Crimean War. Leaders are constantly looking for ways to enhance the curriculum. They have plans to ensure that all pupils understand the heritage of their local area, by organising trips to significant historical buildings and museums within the city. Leaders recognise that some foundation subject leaders are new to post and have organised further professional development to enable them to have a greater impact on their area of responsibility.
- All pupils also have many opportunities to participate in sporting activities. School teams have won numerous awards at both local and county level. This is highly commendable, considering that there is no grassed area at the school to practise on.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- disadvantaged pupils continue to make strong progress and further reduce the difference between themselves and other pupils nationally
- the most able pupils continue to make strong progress in writing, so that by the end of key stage 2 a greater proportion achieve at the higher standard.

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

Yours sincerely

Brian Macdonald
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you and your deputy headteacher to discuss the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement. I held discussions with your inclusion coordinator and members of the governing body. I met with a representative from the local authority. I considered the school's documentation relating to governance, safeguarding and pupils' progress and attainment. I took account of the 47 responses to the staff questionnaire and the 119 parent responses to Ofsted's confidential online survey, Parent View. I spoke to several parents before school and considered the 63 free-text messages submitted by parents to Ofsted. I talked with pupils both formally and at breaktime and took account of 114 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.