

24 April 2018

Mr Paul Woolner
Headteacher
Whitstone Community Primary School
Oak Lane
Whitstone
Holsworthy
Devon
EX22 6TH

Dear Mr Woolner

Short inspection of Whitstone Community 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 October 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.**

Situated between the towns of Bude and Launceston, the school sits at the heart of the small village community of Whitstone. The school attracts pupils from the immediate vicinity but also further afield.

You lead a stable staff team whose members work cohesively with one another and endorse leaders' priorities. However, that stability has not been reflected in the governing body. In recent times, there have been significant changes to the leadership and numbers of members of the governing body. Governors acknowledge that steadiness is now required. There have been increased opportunities for governors to maintain an overview of the school's performance but this work is still in its infancy. At present, governors are overseeing the recruitment for your successor and understand that this appointment is vital if leadership and management are to continue to improve.

Behaviour is a strength, pupils conduct themselves well across the school and in lessons. They demonstrate courtesy both with visitors to the school and with their peers. Incidents of poor behaviour are few and pupils, staff and parents agree that behaviour is a strength of the school.

At the last inspection, the areas identified for improvement were increasing pupils' attendance and providing opportunities for pupils to write about their interests. While attendance very much remains an area for improvement, pupils have wider opportunities to write. Pupils have participated in writing competitions held locally and also have opportunities to contribute to the local community magazine and the school publication.

At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the lines of enquiry that I would be considering during the day. The first explored how well leaders' actions have improved pupils' progress in writing across key stage 2, particularly as this has been consistently poor over the last three years. Next, I considered how the approach to teaching reading across key stage 1 develops pupils' word-reading and comprehension skills. Last of all, I explored how teaching, learning and assessment support boys to make strong progress in reading across key stage 2.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders oversee staff appointment procedures effectively. By ensuring that there are adequate members of the interview panel who are trained in safer recruitment, checking employers' references robustly and making background checks, they gather vital information about potential employees' suitability to work with children. You have ensured that this information is recorded effectively in the school's single central record and monitored frequently. You complete the local authority's audit on the effectiveness of safeguarding across the school and act swiftly on any recommendations.

Once staff start working at your school, they have a thorough induction process to enable them to be fully prepared for their specific role in keeping pupils in your school safe. All members of staff have level 2 training in child protection and this has helped them to recognise potential concerns and, most importantly, pass on these concerns to leaders responsible for safeguarding. Although concerns are few in number, you can demonstrate how you have acted proportionately to each one, particularly when involving external agencies. As a result, pupils are safe.

You acknowledge that pupils' rates of absence from school must be reduced and the local authority is supporting you in this. Although improvements are evident, absence and persistent absence remain above national averages. You are raising awareness of this by working with the educational welfare officer and promoting good attendance through the school newsletter.

Inspection findings

- For the previous three years, pupils' progress in writing has been poor. In 2017, progress was significantly below the progress made by pupils nationally. Furthermore, the proportions of pupils working at expectations for their age and the higher standard by the end of key stage 2 have been below national averages for the last two years. Consequently, the local authority is now involved in helping the school bring about improvements.

- Leaders have identified spelling, punctuation and grammar as a barrier to pupils' progress. They have heightened the emphasis on this area of writing in the curriculum. Although this focus has increased opportunities to learn specific skills, it has not yet consistently benefited the quality of pupils' writing. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to apply the skills that they have learned. Leaders are adamant that focusing on spelling, punctuation and grammar is worthwhile. However, pupils are keen to explain how they much prefer reading to writing, and cite the focus on spelling, punctuation and grammar as a reason for these attitudes to writing. Leaders acknowledge the need to develop pupils' love of writing if their progress and application of spelling, punctuation and grammar are to improve. Leaders engage pupils in writing competitions with local schools and this is proving to be a good step in the right direction.
- Writing in pupils' workbooks varies. This is because teachers' expectations of pupils' learning are not consistently high enough, leading to standards of handwriting and presentation that are too variable. Despite an increase in opportunities for pupils to write, the quantity pupils produce in lessons is sometimes limited. This restricts pupils' writing development. Given this, together with pupils' less than enthusiastic attitudes to writing, it is not yet clear that leaders' actions are improving outcomes in writing. In Years 3, 4 and 5, the proportion of pupils working at expectations for their age has decreased from the end of key stage 1 benchmark.
- Pupils' reading and comprehension skills get off to a flying start across key stage 1 in terms of phonics development. Phonics sessions are focused and snappy and adults' constant and effective use of assessment means that pupils are both well supported and challenged. As a result, pupils keep up well. In the previous three years, all pupils reached the expected standards in the phonics screening check by the end of Year 2. Once pupils have finished the school's phonics programme, they seamlessly transfer to the spelling programme, where sessions are equally high in quality.
- Although all pupils reached the expected standard in the phonics screening check by the end of Year 2 in 2017, the proportion reaching expectations for their age in reading was lower than national averages. I explored how pupils develop their wider reading skills, such as reading fluency and their ability to understand and explain what they have read. Pupils have regular reading opportunities, from guided reading in school and sharing books at both home and school. Reading activities are varied and link to the books that pupils are reading. At times, these activities lack challenge and do not fully extend pupils' understanding. An example of this is where pupils answer 'yes or no' to statements about the book they have read, or have to match two parts of a sentence to form a correct sentence. Teachers are effective in sharing information about what pupils can do from class to class and pupils successfully continue their reading development when they move to a new class, year group or teacher.
- In recent years, boys' progress in reading has been poor across key stage 2. In 2017, their progress was below that of girls, which meant that fewer boys were working at expectations for their age and reaching the higher standard. Across the school, reading has had a high profile in recent years. As a result, pupils speak about enjoying their reading experiences and can name their favourite

books and authors. Among boys, authors such as Michael Morpurgo are particularly popular. They recognise similarities between their local setting and the setting in many Michael Morpurgo books and empathise with the characters. This makes them keen to read the full catalogue of books and share their reading experiences enthusiastically with their peers.

- Although some boys are keen to express their enjoyment of reading, this is not consistent across key stage 2. Reading records show that opportunities for pupils to read a range of authors and styles often vary. In some cases, pupils read daily and record a range of books in their reading records. The reading records of other boys show that they have far fewer and less frequent opportunities to read widely. Leaders acknowledge that boys' commitment to reading is not yet consistent and recognise how this could affect their progress across key stage 2.

Next steps for the school

Senior leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they design a writing curriculum that encourages pupils across key stage 2 to develop a love of writing, value opportunities to write and be eager to write across a range of genres
- pupils across key stage 2 have regular opportunities to apply the skills that they have learned in spelling, punctuation and grammar, so that their progress improves and a greater proportion of pupils work at the standard expected for their age and at the higher standard
- they monitor their areas of responsibility closely, including the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, so that they have an accurate overview of the school's performance and can drive improvements, including reducing absence and persistent absence
- boys' attitudes to reading improves, so that more read widely and often and a greater proportion make stronger progress by the end of key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Nathan Kemp
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spoke to you and your key stage 1 leader. I met with two representatives of the governing body and spoke with a representative of the local authority. Furthermore, I considered a recent monitoring visit by the local authority representative who came to ascertain leaders' impact on improving pupils' progress

in writing and attendance. I also met with a group of pupils to determine their attitudes to reading and writing. You and I made visits to lessons across the school to observe pupils and capture your approach to teaching, learning and assessment. We also scrutinised the work in pupils' books.

I looked at a range of documentary evidence, which included the school's self-evaluation and the current school development plan, considering the impact of leaders' actions on areas of school improvement. I also considered the school's current assessment information to establish pupils' progress. Additionally, I scrutinised various safeguarding records, including those relating to the suitability of staff to work with children and training opportunities for staff. I also met with the designated safeguarding leader. I took account of 15 responses to the Parent View online survey, six responses to the staff survey and one response to the pupil survey.