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Mr Christian Robson
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Dear Mr Robson

Short inspection of Southwick Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 March 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 October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Working alongside a talented deputy headteacher and supported well by a dedicated and determined governing body, your skilful leadership has brought about recent improvements to teaching and learning. There is a tangible drive and sense of urgency to provide high-quality opportunities which allow pupils to thrive within the school's caring and supportive environment. You have identified and evaluated the school's strengths and current priorities, and detail further actions to address these priorities in the comprehensive and perceptive school development plan.

Your appointment has brought a steady hand during recent changes in leadership, minimising any potential disruption. Improvement in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is now accelerating the rates of progress of current pupils across the school, quickly. You, governors and other school leaders keep a close eye on the quality of teaching. Phase leaders are empowered to take full responsibility for their area of school, which has brought a fresh focus and energy to improving provision. You acknowledge that the many whole-school initiatives and strategies to further improve teaching are not yet impacting fully on published outcomes for pupils in key stage 1 and the early years. You are continuing to drive improvement in these areas effectively.

Pupils' excellent attitudes to learning and good relationships with adults remain key strengths of your inclusive school. Pupils develop good citizenship skills, being keen to take on responsibilities through roles such as 'class monitor', being a member of the school council or a house captain. They take great pride in the well-ordered school environment both inside and outside, benefiting from high-quality displays in classes and shared areas. Pupils' behaviour in class and around school remains good. You recognise that despite your best endeavours, the attendance rates of some pupils are still not good enough.

At the previous inspection, leaders were asked to improve the quality of teaching so that it was of a consistently high standard across school. This has been tackled with resolve. Teachers plan work that is pitched well to challenge and stretch pupils of different abilities, including the most able pupils. The most able disadvantaged pupils also achieve very well, and their progress and attainment exceeded those of other pupils nationally in last summer's key stage 2 tests. Teachers ask searching questions that require pupils to think carefully and justify their answers.

Pupils show good levels of independence in lessons, work enthusiastically and cooperatively with their classmates to share ideas and discuss their understanding. Older pupils are skilled at assessing their own and others' work against agreed criteria.

Safeguarding is effective.

In your role as designated safeguarding leader, you ensure that policies, procedures and records are of high quality and up to date. Summary records of incidents of concern, no matter how small, are meticulously kept using the new online system. The recent safeguarding audit by an external consultant highlights the school's strength in this area, and its determination to leave no stone unturned in its duty to keep pupils safe.

There are very few records of incidents of poor behaviour or alleged bullying, and the pupils with whom I spoke stated categorically that no bullying happens at Southwick Community Primary. They trust their teachers implicitly to keep them safe and solve any problems or concerns.

All staff are appropriately trained and have access to well-written policies and guidance. As a result, they have a secure understanding of their individual responsibilities for safeguarding. Pupils are very knowledgeable about bullying and e-safety. They understand how to avoid situations that may prove dangerous when not at school, including accessing social media.

The long-established culture of keeping pupils safe and putting them at the heart of the friendly and inclusive school community remains very evident. The personal development and welfare of all pupils are key areas of focus for the school, supported well by the work of the inclusion officer and the school counselling service.

Inspection findings

- Since your appointment, you have taken determined and rigorous actions to improve the quality of teaching and accelerate the progress of current pupils. This follows the disappointing outcomes of pupils' 2016 key stage 1 national assessments in reading and writing. Work seen in pupils' books during the inspection, and analysis of the school's tracking data, demonstrate strong progress for nearly all pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. It is too early to see the full impact of actions to improve teaching on published outcomes for pupils in the early years and key stage 1.
- Improvements in the quality of teaching have already impacted very positively on outcomes for pupils at the end of key stage 2. Results from the 2016 assessments show that progress in reading and mathematics is significantly above average for all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils. Pupils also attained very highly in the reading assessment.
- Effective support from local authority officers and purposeful partnership working with your local cluster of primary schools has provided good-quality professional development opportunities for staff.
- Governors are skilled in their roles and determined to become even more effective. A recent audit of governors' skills has led to the recruitment of new governors. This has brought a range of new professional skills to the school, such as those in human resources and performance management. Governors know the school very well and the journey it has taken to reach this point. They have individual links to key areas of school. Governors take nothing at face value, questioning and challenging school leaders very effectively.
- Children are now making a good start in their learning in the early years. They are making increasingly rapid progress from starting points below those expected for their age when they begin Nursery. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception is improving each year, but remains below that seen nationally. You acknowledge that expectations of what children can achieve in reading and writing in Nursery and Reception could have been higher in the past.
- Children in the early years play and learn happily together. Their behaviour is excellent and they show independence and good manners. Children are now getting off to a good start in reading. The systematic and rigorous teaching of phonics starts in Reception and continues across key stage 1. Some pupils in Years 1 and 2 read well to the inspector and were able to build and blend unknown words.
- Teachers pitch work well to match pupils' abilities, including for the most able pupils. Pupils in Year 6 were working in pairs to assess a finished piece of writing to practise their editing skills. They checked for use of the third person, the correct tense, and evidence of different sentence types, structures and openers successfully.

- Pupils are provided with many opportunities to use their developing English skills in extended writing activities, such as Year 2 pupils comparing Southwick with the Arctic. Pupils in Year 5 identified the structures and features of a sonnet as part of their work on William Shakespeare. They used strong imagery and personification to improve their own sonnet effectively.
- Work in pupils' books is of a much improved standard since the start of the year, and is extremely well presented with neatly formed, legible, joined handwriting. Pupils are proud of how much they have improved.
- The school has many strategies to encourage and celebrate pupils' regular and punctual attendance. These include the work undertaken by the inclusion officer, and a range of class and individual prizes. However, you recognise that currently these are having minimal impact on improving the attendance of a large group of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, some of whom are still regularly and persistently absent.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- agreed initiatives and actions to improve the quality of teaching impacts positively on published outcomes for pupils in key stage 1 and the early years
- their expectation of what children can achieve in the early years is high, especially in reading and writing
- the rates of attendance for all pupils improve quickly and the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent falls, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Philip Scott
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and the inclusion officer. You and I visited lessons in key stages 1 and 2, and I visited the Reception class with the deputy headteacher. I met with the chair, and other members of the governing body. I spoke to pupils about their work and their views of the school. I listened to some pupils read and looked in pupils' workbooks when in lessons. I met with a representative of the local education authority. A range of documents were considered relating to safeguarding, performance management, governors'

meetings and external evaluations of the school. I examined the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan and tracking of current pupils' progress. I also scrutinised pupils' recent achievement in statutory assessments and the school's website.