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Mrs Teresa Gilbert
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Gilbert

Short inspection of Bowlsh Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 15 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Your determined leadership has improved the school in many areas since your appointment in September 2012. In the last two years, a new chair of the governing body has been appointed and so have many new governors. You work effectively with the governing body and so strategic planning is clear and focused on the right priorities. You have created a leadership team which is cohesive and effective. Together, you have been successful in establishing greater consistency in the quality of teaching because of your clarity of purpose. Staff and parents agree that the school is well led.

You set a positive example to staff and pupils alike. This has resulted in a friendly atmosphere throughout the school. Pupils have good relationships with staff and with each other; they feel secure and, therefore, they are able to enjoy learning together. You have made sure that communication with parents is good. Pupils experience a positive start to school life because the induction process is well thought through. Teaching is effective and, consequently, pupils are given the support they need to succeed, no matter what their background. When they leave, the proportion of pupils who attain the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 is in line with the national average.

You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. You have raised teachers' expectations; they are now planning work for pupils which provides the challenge necessary to help them learn. At the previous inspection governors did not know how effectively the extra funding for disadvantaged pupils was being used. This is no longer the case. You provide governors with accurate assessment information and they provide you with robust challenge where it is needed. Your healthy relationship with governors has resulted in sharper evaluation of the support work for disadvantaged pupils. You and your senior team recognise the dip in the outcomes for these pupils in 2016 and you are taking steps to improve their progress.

You are ambitious for all pupils. Although pupils' performance overall was in line with the national average last year, you are aware of differences for some groups. For example, girls did not perform as well as boys in mathematics in Year 2. In the phonics screening check in Year 1, boys did not perform as well as girls. You are seeking to reduce these differences for current pupils, and there are indications of some success.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have made sure that pupils' well-being and safety are central to all aspects of the school's work. You and your senior team have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. The arrangements for checking the suitability of staff to work with children meet requirements. You ensure that staff have the necessary safeguarding training. As a result, staff are well informed about the possible signs of harm and they remain vigilant. Governors are well informed about safeguarding issues both locally and nationally. For example, they are aware of the potential threat from radicalisation and extremist views and they assess this risk proportionately to the local context.

Pupils express their views about safety confidently. They know they can speak to you or any other member of staff if they are worried or upset. They are taught about different risks and how to keep themselves safe effectively. For example, pupils are briefed carefully about safety issues before going on school visits. Teachers' good relationships with pupils contribute strongly to pupils feeling safe and well cared for. The school building and outdoor areas are tidy and well maintained. Equipment in the playground is in good working order and all areas are kept clean. The school is a bright, welcoming and safe environment.

Inspection findings

- Senior leaders are striving to improve the school further. They make regular checks on the quality of teaching and use these to identify priorities for improvement. Staff feel included in the self-evaluation process, and consequently they are well motivated and clear about their objectives. Senior leaders take pupils' views into account systematically. For example, in a recent survey pupils said they felt the games being played at playtime had become too rough. Leaders took swift action to separate playtime for younger pupils and pupils from

key stage 1. Leaders have trained a small number of pupils as 'play leaders' and given them some responsibility for managing the games that are played on the playground. Subsequently, there are early signs that games are better organised and pupils are enjoying playtime more.

- To ascertain that the school remained good, the first key line of enquiry concerned the progress of girls in mathematics in key stage 1. In 2016 the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics by the end of Year 2 was near to the national average. The proportion of pupils going further and attaining a greater depth of understanding was just above average. However, the boys contributed most to this. Leaders have identified that teaching did not fully develop pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics and a small number of girls were less confident in this aspect of the curriculum. Teachers now use skilled questioning to challenge pupils to explain their thinking when tackling mathematical problems. As a result, girls in Year 2 are developing their skills in this area securely. However, not all staff are yet adept at developing pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics.
- Another key line of enquiry looked at the support given to disadvantaged pupils in the school. Disadvantaged pupils' attainment was lower than that of other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 1 in 2016. Fewer disadvantaged children achieved a good level of development by the end of Reception Year than other children in the school last year. Senior leaders do evaluate the effectiveness of their work to support disadvantaged pupils; however, last year they did not react quickly enough to address slower progress. Senior leaders now employ a greater range of strategies and they are more adept at changing their approach. Disadvantaged pupils are now receiving support which is better suited to their individual needs. Consequently, they are making better progress from their different starting points.
- A third key line of enquiry centred on pupils' phonics knowledge in Year 1. Pupils' attainment in phonics at the end of Year 1 was a little lower last year compared to strong performance in previous years. Senior leaders identified that this was due to pupils, a small number of boys in particular, not having the stamina to keep going when developing their early reading skills. Senior leaders have ensured that teaching is now well matched to pupils' ability level and so these pupils receive good support to practise their skills. Observations of pupils' learning in phonics show that teaching is helping to build on pupils' emerging knowledge. However, some boys still have difficulty blending sounds together to make words.
- Pupils are confident when talking to adults. They are eager to use the skills they have developed and express themselves clearly. Parents support the school. They recognise the good standard of education that it provides and the confidence it gives their children. One parent's comment was typical of many: 'I am always very proud to say my children attend Bowlsh when talking to other parents.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- professional development for all staff focuses on the teaching of reasoning in mathematics
- pupils' phonics skills are developed further, especially the ability of boys to blend sounds together at an earlier stage.

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

Paul Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and with senior leaders. I also met with the chair of the governing body and two other governors. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I held a meeting with pupils from the school council, and several play leaders, and I spoke with many other pupils informally at playtime. I made observations of learning across the school, looked at examples of pupils' work and spoke with pupils during lessons. I scrutinised a variety of documents including the school's own evaluation of its performance, assessment information, records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children and information relating to behaviour and attendance. I took account of responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire from 10 staff and 25 parents. I considered the school's own surveys of pupils' and parents' views and I spoke with several parents at the start of the school day.