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Miss Sarah Laundry  
Headteacher  
Southcott Lower School  
Bideford Green  
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Bedfordshire  
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Dear Miss Laundry

### **Short inspection of Southcott Lower School**

Following my visit to the school on 12 September 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 June 2013.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

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

You, your deputy headteacher, staff and governors have created an environment in which every child feels valued. Parents are very supportive, with all parents who took part in the online survey recommending the school, as they believe that their children are happy and taught well. You and the governors share the same high level of commitment and drive required to bring about continued improvement. This is reflected in the confidence that staff and parents have in the school's leadership to further improve the school.

The children come first and are central to the school's work. You have created an inclusive community where the individual needs of children are thoughtfully and effectively met. Your school is a very caring and nurturing environment. One parent reflected the views of many when writing: 'The school is led by an exceptional team who love their pupils. We know our children are taught well and that they feel part of the Southcott family.'

Since the previous inspection, leaders and governors have been successful in addressing the areas for improvement identified. You have looked closely at the quality of feedback that teachers provide to pupils. You have provided guidance and training to staff and it is evident that the quality of feedback has improved. As a

result, pupils have a greater awareness of what they need to do in order to move their learning forward and have opportunities to address areas for development within their lessons. Throughout the school, staff encourage pupils to keep trying with their learning and not to be afraid if they make mistakes. Pupils I spoke to told me that they find the feedback they receive from teachers helpful and they know it is important to 'never give up'.

Another area for development from the previous inspection was to give pupils more opportunities to write at length in order to further develop their writing skills. During the inspection, I saw pupils engaged in a range of writing tasks and their books from the previous academic year show an impressive amount of writing for different purposes. This breadth and quality of work clearly show that most pupils in all year groups are making at least good progress in writing from their various starting points. Although this is a positive improvement, you know that there is still work to do to ensure that all pupils make rapid progress in writing. You have already identified that pupils with lower starting points in key stage 1 do not always achieve as well as they should.

Governors provide a strong, strategic direction for the school. At the time of the previous inspection, governors were identified as needing further training to ensure that they were able to carry out their statutory responsibilities fully and effectively. Current governors have received a range of training from the local authority and with local schools and this has increased their understanding of what is required of them. Governors take their roles seriously. They challenge the standards pupils achieve and monitor and gather information to check for themselves how rapidly improvements are being made.

You and the governors know the school very well and continually evaluate the school's strengths and weaknesses to help you accurately plan for future improvement. The school's self-evaluation document is fully effective in ensuring that action plans focus on the most important areas that will further improve standards.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team and governors have created a culture of safeguarding at the school. Comprehensive and regular staff training ensures that staff know what to do if they have any concerns. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You make certain that all the checks are made on staff to ensure that they can work with children. You work closely with other professionals and services so that children and families receive timely and effective support.

Pupils behave very well in lessons and around the school because of the positive relationships they have with staff and the high standards of behaviour that all staff consistently expect of them. Pupils told me that the adults in the school will listen to them if they have any worries. They do not feel that bullying is an issue. Pupils are clear that staff deal with the rare issues of poor behaviour firmly and fairly. Parents

are also confident that their children are safe and well looked after.

## **Inspection findings**

- In order to check whether the school remains good, I followed a number of key lines of enquiry. I considered the quality of teaching and learning in the early years. This is because, since the previous inspection, the school now includes three-year-olds through its pre-school provision. Also, at the time of the previous inspection, the early years was identified as a strength of the school.
- Staff in the pre-school and Reception classes work closely together so that children enjoy the same high-quality provision across the early years. You provide a stimulating and caring environment so that individual needs are met well and children quickly grow in confidence. The fully resourced, well-planned outside environment ensures that children are given many opportunities to learn in a creative and purposeful way. The early years curriculum has been successfully developed across the pre-school and Reception classes to include activities that appeal to children's interests and effectively promote their enjoyment of learning.
- From looking at the school's assessment information and the work produced in children's learning journeys from the previous academic year, it is evident that most children in the early years make at least good progress from their starting points. You have rightly identified that some children do not yet develop their speaking and listening skills quickly enough to ensure that they make strong progress in reading and writing. You are already addressing this through staff training and a focus on activities to rapidly develop children's communication skills.
- Another area I explored was the progress that pupils make in lower key stage 2. This is because pupils leave the school part way through a key stage and there are no national assessments to indicate their achievement.
- Pupils who remain at the school after key stage 1 make at least good progress. In all classes, there is a calm, purposeful atmosphere and pupils willingly follow teachers' instructions. Classrooms are attractive. Displays celebrate pupils' work and provide them with helpful prompts and examples of how to make their work better. Teachers plan lessons which hold pupils' interest and capture their imagination. Pupils develop their reading and writing skills well through other subjects, such as history and science. One pupil who was proudly showing me his workbooks commented: 'We do lots of different writing, so we learn more.'
- From the work in pupils' books from the previous academic year, and from speaking with pupils, the evidence shows that they continue to make strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, pupils are being equipped with the academic skills to be fully ready for the next stages of their education.
- Finally, I focused on whether leaders use the pupil premium funding effectively to ensure the best outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. The published assessment information for this relatively small group suggested that disadvantaged pupils do not attain as well as other pupils nationally. However, the low numbers of pupils involved could have distorted the assessment information, so this needed further

clarification with leaders during the inspection.

- Leaders, including governors, view the achievement and well-being of disadvantaged pupils in the school as a high priority. Leaders, led by your deputy headteacher, quickly and effectively identify any barriers to learning. Funding is used to organise personalised extra help in lessons, according to the pupils' individual needs. You also ensure that disadvantaged pupils access a wide range of activities, such as trips and after-school clubs, to broaden their experiences and build their self-esteem.
- Leaders regularly monitor the progress that disadvantaged pupils make so that any gaps in learning are swiftly addressed. Leaders are equally tenacious in tracking the attendance of disadvantaged pupils to ensure that no learning time is lost.
- We looked together at the achievement of each disadvantaged pupil using the school's assessment information. This demonstrates that your active and thorough approach ensures that disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, make at least good progress throughout the school and are sometimes outperforming other pupils nationally.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- children's communication skills improve rapidly in the early years so that more children attain expected levels in reading and writing at the end of the Reception Year
- teachers improve the outcomes in writing by the end of key stage 1 for those pupils with lower starting points.

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

Yours sincerely

Fiona Webb  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

- Meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher and governors, including the chair of governors, where we discussed the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, the school's internal evaluation of its performance, plans for future

improvement and information about current pupils' attendance, progress and attainment.

- I gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included joint observations of teaching and learning in classes with you and the deputy headteacher, and sampling of pupils' current work across all subjects and across a wide range of abilities.
- I spoke informally to a number of pupils in classrooms about their learning, and met more formally with a group of pupils to talk about their school experience.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff and case studies about referrals made to external agencies. A discussion was held with you as the school's designated safeguarding lead.
- I spoke to the local authority adviser on the telephone about how they support the school.
- The views of 55 parents who responded to Parent View were taken into account, as well as the 48 responses parents made using the free-text service.
- I also considered the 13 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey and the 60 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.