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Mr Ewan Caldwell
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Caldwell

Short inspection of Paxcroft Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 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 April 2014.

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.**

You and governors have strengthened the middle leadership structure in the school. This is beginning to improve aspects of quality in the school. For example, subject leaders have an increasing, positive influence on improving the thoroughness of assessment systems in their subjects to ensure that teaching builds on what pupils already know.

You and governors have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school. However, the pace and impact of your work are not yet having the widespread effect needed for the school's relative weaknesses to be remedied swiftly. There is some improvement. For example, you have ensured that staff training has been successful in deepening teachers' subject knowledge in mathematics. Over the last 12 months, the teaching of mathematics has been enhanced so that there is better coverage of all aspects of the mathematics curriculum. As a result, pupils' fluency in mathematics is improving. Current pupils can use and apply their mathematical skills to solve problems and reason increasingly well. Pupils' progress in mathematics is usually good. However, this is not yet replicated in pupils' attainment in writing. Too few current pupils have the skills and knowledge expected for their age. Your expectations of pupils in Year 1 are not yet high enough. Some pupils are not challenged enough and so, for these pupils, progress falters.

You recognise that teaching is too variable in a few classes. Inconsistencies in teaching result in some previously low-attaining pupils not catching up rapidly. In addition, insufficient challenge in some classes means that some middle-attaining pupils across the school are not yet making the progress of which they are capable. This hampers some pupils' progress in writing.

Your governors are determined in their actions. They visit the school to find out the impact of school improvement initiatives for themselves. Increasingly, they meet with middle and senior leaders to evaluate the impact of the school's work. This has confirmed that strengthening the middle leadership structure is proving beneficial. However, governors recognise that pupils' outcomes have been too inconsistent in recent years and there is still more to do to ensure that leaders' actions result in raising pupils' achievement further.

At the last inspection, you were asked to improve the way in which the school self-evaluates its effectiveness and plans for its development. This has only been achieved in part. You provide governors with a range of information about the progress that groups of pupils make. The current action plan is tightly focused on the right aspects of improvement. However, evaluations too often focus on whether an action has been completed rather than its impact on raising pupils' achievement. This makes it difficult for governors to get all the information they need to evaluate the school's effectiveness.

Parents are very positive about the school. Almost every parent who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school to another parent. A small minority of parents state that they would like more information about the progress that their children make. I found the vast majority of pupils to be happy, cooperative, polite and well-mannered. Pupils say their teachers are kind and help them learn well.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of keeping children safe at Paxcroft. The single central record is meticulously kept. Checks on staff before they join the school and staff training are fully compliant and in line with current legislation. Staff use and apply their training well to ensure that they minimise any potential risks of harm for pupils. Staff are assiduous in recording and following up any concerns. Leaders responsible for safeguarding work closely with external agencies. They make timely referrals and escalate concerns if they assess that their pupils are not getting the support they need to keep safe. Pupils feel safe in school and say that they know how to keep safe. Almost every parent who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, agrees that their child is safe and well looked after.

Inspection findings

- Among the aspects that I examined was the quality of phonics teaching and pupils' ability to apply their phonics skills to spelling words accurately. The

proportion of pupils who have met the expected standard in the phonics screening check in Year 1 has been consistently lower than the national average.

- Phonics is taught systematically and regularly. In some teaching groups, teaching is precisely matched to pupils' needs. However, teaching is too variable in a few teaching groups. This means that these pupils have to sit and wait for learning that meets their needs, or they do not get enough practice at applying their phonics knowledge and skills. Leaders' checks on teaching, learning and assessment have not picked this up. Leaders' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not sufficiently high. This restricts some pupils' phonics development.
- Another aspect I looked at was the progress of current pupils in writing. There has been a notable decline in pupils' outcomes in writing at the end of key stage 1. In addition, published performance information at key stage 2 shows that the proportion of middle-attaining pupils and the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who met the standards expected for their age in writing were considerably lower than those seen nationally in 2017.
- Pupils' workbooks show that where teachers' expectations are uniformly high pupils make good progress in their writing. However, some workbooks in key stage 1 and lower key stage 2 show that pupils who were previously low-attaining are not catching up quickly enough. Too often, pupils' writing is poorly presented, and their spelling weak. In addition, in a few classes, teaching does not routinely require pupils to expand their ideas or edit and improve their work. This hampers the progress that middle-attaining pupils make in their writing overall.
- I investigated how well pupils attend school. In the recent past, some disadvantaged pupils have not attended well enough. When pupils are absent from school, teachers support them on their return to cover the work they have missed. As a result of leaders' close tracking, pupils' attendance has improved so that it is broadly in line with the national average. However, the number of pupils who are persistently absent is rising. Leaders' actions are not yet ensuring that pupils' attendance is good enough.
- Finally, I reviewed the impact of the leadership systems on bringing about school improvement. This is because, in the recent past, pupils' progress has been too inconsistent for some groups of pupils. You have ensured that there is a stringent system for managing teachers' performance. However, leaders' checks on teaching are not rigorous enough and do not give teachers clear enough guidance about how to improve their teaching so that pupils' achievement rises. Middle leaders are working on the right aspects of improvement. Their work is beginning to remedy prior weaknesses in pupils' progress. However, this work is too recent to make full amends for previously slower progress in pupils' writing.
- Governors challenge leaders in meetings and through their regular visits to the school. However, governors do not receive all the information they need from leaders, including external reports from the local authority, to make a fully informed judgement about the school's overall performance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- governors receive all the information they need, including external monitoring reports, to evaluate the school's overall effectiveness
- governors hold senior and middle leaders to account for ensuring that checks on teaching and learning are regular and measure pupils' progress from their different starting points
- teachers receive explicit feedback so that they know what is required to strengthen pupils' achievement so that it is consistently good
- the teaching of writing improves so that low-attaining pupils catch up rapidly and the middle-attaining pupils achieve the rates of progress in writing of which they are capable
- the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school is reduced
- the teaching of phonics is consistently good so that the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard of the Year 1 phonics screening check is at least in line with the national average and pupils can apply their phonics skills to their writing to spell with accuracy.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Carrington
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I spoke with you, other school leaders, and two governors. I met with a representative from Wiltshire local authority. We made visits to lessons to observe pupils' learning and to scrutinise their work. I met with a small group of pupils. I also talked to pupils in lessons and listened to their views about the school.

I considered a range of documentary evidence, which included the school's self-evaluation reports, development plans and school performance information. I also looked at monitoring records for teaching, learning and assessment, your analysis of pupils' attendance, behaviour and safeguarding documentation.

In addition, I took account of 59 responses to the Parent View online survey and the free-text messaging service. I gathered the views of staff through discussions during the inspection.