

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



4 July 2018

Mrs Naomi Philp
Headteacher
Dunster First School
13 St George's Street
Dunster
Minehead
Somerset
TA24 6RX

Dear Mrs Philp

Short inspection of Dunster First School

Following my visit to the school on 12 June 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 September 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment as headteacher, at the beginning of this academic year, you have implemented an innovative and successful approach to developing staff skills. As a united team, you and your staff have built well on the pupils' good achievement sustained by your predecessor.

Governors, too, have undergone recent change. They are managing links with an increased number of schools in the federation effectively to make continued use of the widened expertise available. You are utilising this expertise supportively to establish more consistency in the way teachers deepen pupils' understanding as they move through the school. You have already widened the stimulating range of learning experiences provided for the pupils to motivate them and boost their personal as well as academic skills. All those associated with the school, including parents, acknowledge the positive way that activities such as visiting the 'Tall Trees Trail' and 'wassailing in the orchard' enrich children's learning.

The very supportive relationships shared by staff and pupils and between the pupils themselves continue to be a key element prompting effective learning across the school. Pupils' impressive personal development, cultivated very supportively from the moment they start school in the Reception class, is a continuing strength. Pupils and parents recognise the high level of care, support and guidance that you and your staff provide. Parents who responded to the online survey were unanimous in recommending the school to others, and were very positive about almost every

aspect of their children's education. As one parent typically wrote: 'The school has a charming community feel to it and the emphasis on teaching kindness is evident throughout. I feel my child is developing skills beyond pure academic skills and he has been very happy.'

Leaders and teachers have given high priority to addressing issues raised by the previous inspection. They have worked effectively to widen the curriculum, boost pupils' interest and secure their productive engagement in learning. The previous inspection report also identified that teachers needed to strengthen the guidance given to pupils to help them to improve their work. Pupils have responded positively. For example, they make rapid progress in learning to read. They are also particularly adept at using phonics to tackle new words, and writing meaningfully using well-constructed sentences. These well-developed skills reflect their positive response to teachers' improved guidance. You recognise the need to provide similarly consistent guidance and increase opportunities for pupils to fully develop their problem-solving skills in mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

A strong culture of safeguarding permeates the day-to-day life of the school. Parents, staff, governors and the pupils themselves acknowledged their responsibility to help keep everyone safe. Pupils, for example, know that they should help each other to use computers safely.

Leaders, including governors, ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Checks on staff recruitment and on all those who work with pupils at the school are of the highest quality. As designated lead, you ensure that you and your staff keep their safeguarding training fully up to date. For example, staff know how to recognise signs of bullying or abuse and know what to do should they have concerns about a child.

All the parents who responded to the online surveys agreed that the school looks after pupils well and keeps them safe. As one parent typically wrote: 'I am indeed extremely confident that my child is very happy, safe, well cared for and educated well at Dunster First School.' Pupils also confidently expressed the view that they feel safe and well looked after at school.

Inspection findings

- I firstly looked at the effectiveness of leaders and teachers in developing pupils' positive learning behaviours and ability to improve their work. You and your teachers have worked hard to ensure that the curriculum offered to the pupils stimulates their interest and motivates them to investigate and learn for themselves. Across the classes, pupils' detailed and descriptive writing, for example in Year 2 about moon landings, clearly shows how much the wide variety of topics enriches their learning.
- Pupils appreciate the different ways teachers inform them about what they should include in their work, what to correct and what to do next to improve.

This is not only evident in pupils' responses in their books, but is also a key feature mentioned by pupils when asked about their work. Pupils say they enjoy working together and feel that they are getting better at finding out for themselves how to improve. Several pupils say that this has helped them to improve their handwriting and spelling, punctuation and grammar. This is evident in the fluent way pupils write at a good level for their age both expressively and extensively.

- Pupils' positive approach to their learning is also seen in the way they eagerly begin their work and increasingly complete tasks in the time given to them by their teachers. Parents are equally enthusiastic about how the school motivates their children to learn and also welcome the way staff encourage and help them to support learning at home. A parent typically wrote: 'Dunster is a wonderful school. The staff work so hard to ensure the pupils enjoy an exciting and varied learning experience.'
- National assessments at the end of Year 2 show that most pupils have at least achieved the standards expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. However, not as many pupils have achieved at greater depth in mathematics as they have in reading and writing. Consequently, I secondly examined the effectiveness of leaders and teachers in increasing the proportion of pupils achieving greater depth in mathematics.
- All teachers sustain a strong and consistent focus on developing pupils' numeracy and calculation skills. For example, during the inspection, Year 2 pupils knowledgeably described the different strategies they could use to complete two- and three-digit additions and subtractions. However, across the classes, work in pupils' books shows some variation in the degree to which teachers enable pupils to use and apply these skills to solve problems.
- You have provided training and enabled teachers to share their expertise. This has deepened their understanding of how pupils develop their skills as they move through the school. As a team, teachers are developing a more consistent and effective emphasis on deepening pupils' reasoning skills. This was evident in a mathematics lesson in Year 4 as pupils relished the challenge to present their calculations to show that multiplication is the inverse of division. You acknowledge that establishing a similarly effective emphasis on deepening pupils' problem-solving skills remains work in progress.
- Next, I reviewed leaders' and teachers' efforts to secure the best progress possible for disadvantaged pupils. You have sustained the high regard given to meeting the different needs of all pupils. Over the course of this academic year, you have embedded a more consistent approach to the assessment of pupils' needs. You have been careful to check and develop pupils' personal and social skills as well as their academic ability, to promote their good progress.
- You use additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities effectively. Your strengthened assessment procedures have highlighted the need, in some instances, to boost pupils' emotional well-being as well as their academic skills. You have had notable success in doing so this year, providing pupils with stimulating music, art and outdoor learning opportunities that have successfully raised their self-confidence

and ability to learn. For example, pupils earnestly explained how activities such as their residential visit to the Pinkery Centre in the heart of Exmoor really help them to learn. As a result, most disadvantaged pupils achieve at least as well as their peers and some do even better.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching further develops pupils' skills to reason and solve problems in mathematics thereby further increasing the proportion of pupils achieving greater depth in this subject.

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

Alexander Baxter
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and other staff who have leadership responsibilities and with governors of the school. I visited classrooms with you and we collected and scrutinised samples of pupils' work in books. I talked with a group of pupils and also with individual pupils during visits to classrooms. I listened to selected pupils reading and talking to you about their reading. I observed lunchtime arrangements and talked with pupils and support staff. In addition, I examined a range of documents relating to safeguarding, pupils' attendance, pupils' progress and the school's self-evaluation and development. I took account of 34 responses to the Ofsted online Parent View survey and 27 additional written comments from parents.