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Chris Marshall  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Marshall

### **Short inspection of Newtown Community Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 4 October 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 March 2015.

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

You and the leadership team have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You are leading the school with determination and purpose. Shortly after you took up post in 2015, you became concerned about the quality of education being offered by the school. Consequently, you commissioned a review by the local authority, which confirmed your findings. Since then, leaders have worked hard, and successfully, to improve the quality of teaching and behaviour. As a result, pupils' achievement overall and for disadvantaged pupils has risen in writing and mathematics. You accept, however, that by the time they leave the school pupils' achievement in reading lags behind these subjects. Leaders have previously prioritised reading in key stage 1, which is having a positive impact, but improvements in key stage 2 are relatively recent.

Since the previous inspection, you have strengthened senior and middle leadership. Responsibilities are now shared among staff, who lead with confidence because they have your trust and have been trained appropriately. Leaders have high expectations of staff and pupils. This is evident in the rigorous appraisal system that is helping to ensure that the quality of teaching improves. It is also apparent in pupils' very good behaviour and the calm, orderly nature of the learning environment.

Leaders are also well supported by governors, who know the school and its context well. They visit frequently and ask searching questions at meetings about pupils' achievement. This questioning, informed by reports from external consultants, school performance information and the headteacher's report, is helping them to

hold leaders to greater account and you welcome the increasing challenge governors are providing.

The local authority has also played an important role in the school's recent improvement. Their honest, objective evaluation of the school's effectiveness shortly after you took up post helped to 'catch the school before it fell'.

There is a palpable sense that all staff are united behind the same common aims and are working hard to do their best by children. The systems and procedures implemented by leaders, whether these relate to the management of behaviour or the teaching of phonics, are applied consistently across the school. All staff who responded to the staff survey issued during the inspection agreed that they were proud to work at the school. Strong staff morale and a commitment to high expectations are driving the school forward. One pupil who spoke with me said that the staff are 'always happy and positive'.

At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the key lines of enquiry to be considered during the day. These included establishing the effectiveness of safeguarding and leaders' actions to raise the achievement of pupils in reading. We also considered to what extent absence, persistent absence and exclusions were reducing. These lines of enquiry are considered below under 'Safeguarding' and 'Inspection findings', where they have not already been referred to.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You and the deputy designated safeguarding lead have a firm grasp of child protection matters. You both ensure that staff are trained appropriately and know what to do should they have concerns about a child. Low-level observations are recorded assiduously and escalated into referrals when appropriate. Safeguarding leads respond to these referrals speedily and appropriately, calling on external agencies when necessary. They are not afraid to take advice when necessary, for example from the local authority's multi-agency safeguarding hub. Carefully organised records are kept so that actions and staff involvement can be tracked.

Checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children are thorough, regularly updated and complete.

Pupils who spoke with me reported that bullying has decreased, and behaviour improved, since you took up post. They said that on the rare occasions that bullying or unpleasant behaviour does occur, both are effectively dealt with by staff. These pupils also showed that they have a good understanding of how to stay safe online.

### **Inspection findings**

- At the previous inspection, leaders were asked to raise achievement in English and mathematics. They have been successful in the main. Pupils' achievement in writing and mathematics has risen. One reason for improvements in writing is that leaders have been proactive about tackling poor spelling and punctuation.

Pupils' work shows that they have many opportunities to practise spelling. Teachers provide useful feedback which helps pupils to improve spelling in successive pieces of work. Reading has also improved in the lower school. However, there is further work to do in key stage 2.

- Leaders have been successful in their efforts to improve the teaching of phonics in the school. Across the school, the school's approach to phonics is applied regularly and consistently by staff. This is helping younger pupils to develop secure reading skills earlier and older pupils, who are behind, to catch up. In 2018, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the national phonics check was above average, as it was in 2017.
- Leaders are now focusing intensive efforts on improving reading in key stage 2. New texts are being provided, which are proving to be highly popular with pupils. Staff match these texts to pupils' abilities and ensure that the most able pupils are challenged and inspired by their reading. The pupils who spoke with me said that they were being encouraged to read on a daily basis and that they were enjoying their reading.
- Pupils' English work shows that tasks have been heavily weighted to writing for different purposes and audiences and developing technical writing skills. This has improved writing achievement. However, there has previously been less emphasis on reading. Nevertheless, leaders are now rightly prioritising reading, with a focus on developing pupils' comprehension skills, although the most able pupils are not yet being consistently challenged to develop these skills and reach higher standards.
- Leaders face challenges in ensuring that attendance is in line with, or above, average. The school has previously had a high proportion of pupils who regularly miss periods of school. The school also has above-average numbers of pupils who join the school at different stages and throughout the year. Nevertheless, leaders are proactive in their efforts to improve attendance and have forged closer relationships with parents to this end. Although attendance figures are still below average, they have improved marginally from last year. Persistent absence fell dramatically in the last academic year and is close to the national average.
- Exclusions have fallen because behaviour has improved significantly. A clear and positive behaviour policy is in place, which enables staff to reinforce the same consistent expectations. In turn, pupils are aware of boundaries because they know what is required of them. I observed pupils being respectful and kind. They moved around the building calmly, and were courteous, well presented and cheerful.

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

- Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that achievement in reading at key stage 2 continues to rise, as a result of:
  - consolidating and monitoring the recent strategies that have been introduced to improve reading
  - the most able pupils being challenged sufficiently across the full range of reading activities.

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

Steve Smith  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I spoke to you and leaders responsible for the teaching of reading and phonics. I also spoke to representatives of the governing body and pupils. I spoke on the telephone with the school improvement partner.

You and I visited lessons to observe pupils' attitudes to learning. I also scrutinised the work in pupils' books and listened to pupils read.

A range of documentary evidence was considered, which included the school's self-evaluation, improvement plan and information relating to pupils' achievement and attendance. Additionally, I scrutinised various safeguarding records, including those relating to the suitability of staff to work with children.

I took account of the 42 responses to the Parent View online survey. In addition, I took account of the 19 responses to the staff survey and the 22 responses to the pupil survey issued during the inspection.