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Ms Melanie Higgs
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Dear Ms Higgs

Short inspection of Aldermaston C.E. Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 March 2019, 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 2015.

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.**

Since your arrival in September last year, you have identified that aspects of the school's work require urgent attention, including in areas like pupils' progress in mathematics and writing. Your action plan shows that you understand what needs to be done. You have worked hard so that leaders, including governors, now share a common vision of academic and social success for all pupils. You have also worked hard to change the attitudes of pupils towards learning. As a result, pupils' behaviour is improving, and they are usually both attentive and engaged in lessons. The impact of pupils' improved behaviour on learning has resulted in a marked reduction in fixed-term exclusions and low-level disruption in lessons this year.

Aldermaston Church of England Primary School provides strong pastoral care for pupils. Pupils told me how well teachers care for their well-being and how much they enjoy learning. Parents are very positive about the school and the work of leaders and staff to care for their children's welfare. This is evident in the comments made by parents on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including, 'The school cares for every aspect of their development', 'The children's welfare is at the heart of all they do' and, 'The school takes a family, holistic approach'.

Governors have not challenged sufficiently the decline in pupils' progress since the

previous inspection. Although they have been frequent visitors to the school, gathering a breadth of information, this has not always enabled them to ask the right questions about the pace of pupils' progress. This has begun to change since your arrival, and the work of the governing body is now more sharply focused on holding you to account for the school's improvement.

You ensure that pupils have access to a broad and creative curriculum. Pupils study a breadth of subjects, including music and French. Throughout the curriculum, pupils develop an informed understanding of the importance of democratic concepts, tolerance and free speech. For example, all pupils are given a range of responsibilities, including running the school library and looking after the school chickens.

Since your appointment, you have focused rigorously on raising standards in the teaching and learning of reading, writing and mathematics in all year groups. You have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and the areas for improvement. Through effective and ongoing collaboration with the local authority, school improvement team and a local schools cluster, you have improved the tracking and monitoring of pupils. As a result, you and your staff are able to identify rapidly pupils who fall behind, and to provide good support. Through your reflective and considered leadership, you are raising the expectations and aspirations of pupils across the school. Staff are unanimous in feeling well supported in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Having identified accurately the issues that have contributed to the decline in pupils' achievement, you have established effective ongoing training for both teachers and teaching assistants.

Teaching, learning and assessment do not consistently meet the needs of all groups of pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, pupils do not make as much progress from their relative starting points as pupils nationally at both key stages 1 and 2. The previous inspection report outlined the importance of improving writing through a stronger focus on spelling, grammar and punctuation. This has not been embedded consistently well in the teaching of writing. Additionally, the previous inspection report noted the importance of improving pupils' application of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Some pupils do not yet apply these mathematical skills with fluency and understanding.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders are meticulous in ensuring that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The emotional and physical well-being of pupils is firmly at the heart of the school's approach to safeguarding. Relationships between staff and pupils are very strong. Pupils state clearly that they feel well cared for and that if they have any concerns they can talk to a member of staff. Leaders are vigilant about internet safety and are fully aware of the changing nature of the dangers posed by the internet. You and your leaders ensure that all pupils learn how to access the internet safely and know what to do if approached by strangers while online.

The overwhelming majority of parents and all staff who responded to the Ofsted

questionnaires agree that pupils are safe, protected and well cared for. Pupils can define bullying accurately, and they state that any concerns are quickly resolved by staff. Pupils also state that the school is a friendly school where they support each other both in the classroom and in the playground.

Leaders, including governors, ensure that records on adults who work at the school are securely maintained, reviewed regularly and are compliant with statutory requirements. Staff are alert to changes in pupils' behaviour, and they follow up concerns swiftly and appropriately.

Inspection findings

- This inspection's first line of enquiry focused on how leaders ensure that pupils make rapid improvements in reading and writing at both key stage 1 and key stage 2. Pupils' progress in 2017 and 2018 in reading and writing at key stage 2 was below the national averages. Current pupils' progress is not consistently good.
- The previous inspection report identified the importance of ensuring that pupils apply their knowledge of grammar, spelling and punctuation in their writing. While I observed Year 6 pupils skilfully draw on the language features they had identified in Rudyard Kipling's 'Just So Stories' in order to shape their own writing, this was a rare feature of pupils' work. Pupils do not consistently craft their writing by considering their language and punctuation choices. Neither do they consistently consider the audience, purpose and text type when selecting vocabulary and sentences for their writing. Consequently, pupils do not make strong progress in writing in many year groups.
- In relation to their reading, pupils do not make explicit links between the texts that they read and their approach to writing. For example, pupils read a breadth of high-quality texts such as the 'Little House on the Prairie' stories by Laura Ingalls Wilder. However, pupils do not consistently draw on their understanding and knowledge of language in order to consider how writers construct settings, characters and themes.
- Pupils are not enabled to develop their writing well enough across the curriculum and in a range of lessons. Equally, in lessons dedicated to writing, such as grammar lessons, pupils do not consistently practise their understanding of grammatical concepts in extended pieces of writing.
- Teachers do not make enough use of what they know about pupils' progress so as to plan the next lessons or activities in reading and writing.
- The second key line of enquiry focused on the progress that pupils at key stages 1 and 2 make in mathematics. In 2017 and 2018, key stage 2 pupils' progress was below the national average. Although leaders have prioritised the use of assessment information about pupils to inform the planning and teaching of lessons, as in reading and writing, it is still not used well in mathematics lessons. Teachers do not systematically draw on pupils' prior attainment to inform the sequences of teaching of mathematics lessons. As a result, some pupils' previous misconceptions are not addressed. These misconceptions pose obstacles to the

progress that some pupils make in learning about new mathematical concepts. Additionally, teachers do not systematically consider the prior attainment of the most able pupils in order to embed challenge in mathematics tasks and activities.

- The previous inspection report stated the importance of providing pupils with sufficient opportunities to apply their knowledge of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division in a breadth of problem-solving activities. Although leaders have introduced new strategies and approaches to strengthen the teaching and learning of mathematics, many pupils struggle to link their mathematical understanding with practical tasks. Some pupils lack fluency in their knowledge of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, which acts as a barrier to accessing more complex mathematical problems.
- The third key line of enquiry focused on the ways in which adults help children to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding in early years. Children's learning journals exemplify the ways in which teachers and teaching assistants extend children's understanding through well-constructed activities. Leaders and staff have ensured that activities and tasks develop children's speaking, listening and thinking skills well. Children listen daily to a range of texts, such as 'Matilda' by Roald Dahl, enabling them to extend their vocabulary and understanding of grammar. Consequently, the proportion of children who reach a good level of development has been consistently at least in line with the national average since the previous inspection.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers make full use of accurate information about pupils' prior learning and targets when planning lessons
- teaching, learning and assessment in reading and writing improves the rate of progress of pupils at key stages 1 and 2 by:
 - making explicit the links between reading and writing
 - ensuring that pupils consider their language choices when writing for specific audiences, purposes and text types
 - ensuring that pupils have opportunities to write extensively across the curriculum.
- in mathematics teaching, staff plan sequences of learning so that:
 - pupils' misconceptions are addressed swiftly
 - pupils apply their knowledge of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division fluently to mathematical problems
 - the most able pupils have regular opportunities to apply their mathematics knowledge to complex problems.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Aykin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I had meetings with you, other senior leaders and middle leaders. I had a meeting with three governors. I spoke with pupils informally in classrooms and when walking around the school's site. I also met formally with a group of 12 pupils to gather their views about the school. I visited a range of lessons to look at pupils' learning across all phases and carried out a separate scrutiny of pupils' work.

Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, along with the record of recruitment checks carried out on all adults working at the school. A range of documentation was looked at, including: the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans; information relating to pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour; the minutes of governors' meetings; and curriculum plans. I considered the views of 26 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including free-text comments. I also considered the views of 23 members of staff.