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Dear Mrs Hutton

Short inspection of Shebbear Community School

Following my visit to the school on 15 November 2016, 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

You took up your role shortly after the previous inspection and have set about overhauling key aspects of the school's work. For example, through your programme of monitoring you have made sure that changes to the curriculum, assessment and teaching have had the intended impact on pupils' learning. You have a clear insight into both the school's successes and those aspects of the school's work which need further attention. Improvement plans reflect your meticulous approach, with their clear timescales and success criteria so all staff know what needs to be done and by when. Governors use the plans well to check the effectiveness of the school's work in a timely manner. Staff are in no doubt about your expectations and rise to the challenge.

A distinct feature of Shebbear is the strong commitment you and your staff share in nurturing pupils. In your endeavours to continually improve the life chances of the pupils, you are assiduous in engaging the advice and support of external agencies. In particular, you and your team work tirelessly to support pupils who have special educational needs and or/disabilities, including those who are disadvantaged. Governors share your ambition and provide a strong degree of challenge to ensure that all pupils, and disadvantaged pupils in particular, achieve well. As a result, these pupils make good progress from their starting points.

The school roll has increased by a third over the last two years, reflecting its popularity as a favoured choice from both within and outside the school's catchment area. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. In their comments in the online survey, Parent View, many speak of the school as 'amazing' and 'brilliant'. A number of parents remarked on the fact that their children 'can't wait to get to school every day'. In particular, parents have tremendous respect for you and your team and value the 'extended family' feel of the school.

At the time of the previous inspection, leaders were asked to raise attainment in mathematics in Years 3 to 6 so that pupils make accurate calculations. The school has tackled this issue effectively. Pupils generally make good progress in mathematics. Work in books shows that pupils calculate accurately and use mathematical reasoning well to solve problems. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 make particularly good progress because of the finely tuned teaching and individual guidance that they receive. Nonetheless, there is still a need to ensure a consistency of expectation across the school so that all of the most able mathematicians receive the challenge they need to achieve the highest standard.

The previous inspection report also highlighted the need to improve the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. Your highly analytical work has ensured that teachers support pupils to make good progress. Work in books shows that teachers give timely advice to help pupils to improve. Pupils value the guidance that teachers provide and respond well. Teachers are generally quick to identify pupils' misconceptions in lessons and work swiftly to address them. Where pupils need to catch up, teachers and teaching assistants provide high-quality intervention. However, teachers' expectations for writing in the early years could be higher, in particular for the middle-ability and most-able pupils. The teaching gives insufficient attention to children's pencil grip and mark-making, and mistakes in letter formation can go uncorrected. There is a contrast between the very comprehensive opportunities children receive in developing their reading skills and the lack of attention to their writing skills. As a result, fewer children in the early years achieve well in writing.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Training is up to date and all requirements have been met. Records are detailed and of high quality. Leaders and governors have fostered a culture in which all staff go about their work with care and vigilance. Pupils say they feel safe because 'adults look after us'. The school provides effective pastoral support for pupils and their families. Pupils are supportive of each other. They are considerate and behave well. Incidents of poor behaviour are very rare. Records show that leaders are fastidious in dealing with concerns that pupils and parents may have. Parents are unanimous in recognising teachers' and leaders' commitment to the safety and well-being of their children. Pupils have absolute trust in the school staff to support them with personal concerns, such as friendship issues.

The school's personal, social, health and economic education programme successfully equips pupils with the knowledge to be safe and stay safe. Pupils are

knowledgeable about potential dangers of the internet and social media. The school supports pupils' understanding of safety related to the specific challenges in their local environment. For example, the curriculum includes helping pupils to understand the dangers of farm machinery and equipment. In addition to promoting a culture where children are safe, the school's curriculum is effective in developing healthy lifestyles. Parents praised the early morning exercise routine their children receive. The wide-ranging clubs also support pupils' fitness and help them to develop sporting interests and lead healthy lifestyles.

Inspection findings

- There are too few pupils in each year group to be able to compare achievement with that of pupils nationally. Leaders analyse pupils' progress effectively. Regular progress meetings with teachers ensure that any slowing down in a pupil's progress is quickly remedied.
- The governors' decision to remove your class teaching responsibilities has had a powerful impact on standards across the school. This decision has enabled you to work alongside teachers to provide support and challenge which has led to much improved outcomes in pupils' grammar, punctuation and spelling in particular.
- Over time, too few pupils have met the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check. However, pupils catch up by the time they leave Year 2. Similarly, whereas in the past not enough children reached the expected standard in the grammar, punctuation and spelling test by the end of Year 6, leaders have taken effective action so that pupils are now making progress at the rates expected of them. Teachers' increased expectations, together with well-matched individual support, has resulted in rapid improvement.
- Children make a relatively slow start in writing in the early years and, although they catch up, a more rapid start would enable more to attain the highest standard. The school uses the broad curriculum well to stimulate pupils' writing, but on occasions teachers do not communicate the highest expectations for pupils to present their work neatly.
- Leaders have effectively improved the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in mathematics. Historically, fewer children have achieved the higher levels in this subject. Leaders have embraced the new national curriculum expectations and effective teaching in the early years is getting children off to a good start in mathematics. Teaching in Years 5 and 6 is particularly effective as activities are planned that require pupils to think more deeply about mathematics. However, there is still a need for greater consistency across the school to ensure that all pupils receive the challenge they need to achieve their best in mathematics.
- The most able pupils, including the very small number of disadvantaged pupils in this group, make generally good progress from their starting points and reach high standards by the end of Year 6.
- The school's curriculum is well balanced and inspires creativity. Its success is reflected in pupils' good rates of progress. For example, pupils shared their great enthusiasm with the inspector for their recent project on chocolate. Pupils were designing recipes for hot chocolate. They used their mathematical skills to 'scale

up' their ingredients in preparation for serving hot chocolate at the forthcoming 'Christmas fayre'.

- Pupils are becoming increasingly well prepared for secondary school when they leave Shebbear. The current school culture is building pupils' confidence, resilience and aspirations effectively. The school liaises well with local partner secondary schools. This helps pupils to make the transition to the next stage of their education.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is consistently strong teaching of mathematics through the school so that the most able mathematicians fully develop their reasoning skills
- teachers in the early years have sufficiently high aspirations and plan suitable activities to ensure that all children achieve well in writing
- teachers demand high-quality presentation of pupils' writing.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracy Hannon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to discuss your evaluation of the school. We visited lessons together and looked at the work in pupils' books. Additionally, I looked at books, external reports and information about pupils' attainment and progress with the leader for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. I spoke with pupils from Years 1 to 6 to discuss their work and gather their views of the school. I spoke with four representatives from the governing body. I also took into account the 30 survey responses from Parent View, the online Ofsted questionnaire for parents, as well as the 13 responses to the staff questionnaire and 18 responses to the pupil questionnaire. I checked the effectiveness of your safeguarding and recruitment arrangements and scrutinised reports from the local authority.

In particular, the inspection focused on the following key lines of enquiry:

- How effective have leaders been in improving the quality of teaching in phonics in the early years and in Year 1 in particular?
- How effectively have leaders raised achievement in key stage 1, particularly in writing?

- How well do leaders ensure that the most able pupils (including the most able disadvantaged pupils), particularly in mathematics, receive the challenge they need to meet the highest standard?
- How well do leaders plan the curriculum so that pupils can make strong progress and build securely on previous learning across all subjects?
- How have leaders, including governors, ensured a culture of high-quality safeguarding across the school?