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Damian Railston
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Dear Mr Railston

Short inspection of Combe Martin Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 2 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 June 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 lead the school with a keen moral purpose. You have developed a leadership team that shares your conviction for ensuring that all pupils receive good-quality teaching. You and your team continually strive to improve teachers' subject knowledge and their skills in developing pupils' good learning behaviours. This has led to the continued success of your school. Your school motto encapsulates the school's work: 'believe, belong and become'. Good teaching empowers pupils to work hard and achieve well, both in their academic and personal development.

Your close work with the other two schools in the federation has created a culture for school improvement. Aspirations are high but are firmly seated in reality. There is no complacency at this school. The executive headteacher ensures that all staff are held to account and that underperformance is assiduously tackled. Every one of the 14 staff who responded to the online questionnaire stated that they were proud to work in the school.

In this drive to improve standards you are supported by the strong federation governing body. The school is fortunate to have two national lead governors on the board. Together with the executive headteacher, who is also a national leader of education, they have a wealth of experience that they put to good use in training newer members of the governing body. Consequently, all governors have a clear understanding of the needs of the school and are well placed to challenge leaders to ensure the best outcomes

for pupils. For example, governors instigated a 0 to 5 early years provision in the school to tackle children's low achievement on entry to school. This has had a positive impact. For the last two years, the proportion of children leaving the early years with a good level of development has been above the national average.

At the time of the previous inspection you were asked to raise teachers' expectations of the standard of presentation of pupils' written work. You have successfully tackled this challenge. The consistent approach and high expectations of presentation across the school result in pupils taking great pride in their learning. In particular, pupils' handwriting from Year 2 to Year 6 is beautifully presented. Art and science work around the school is also of a high quality and reflects the care that pupils take in their learning.

The previous inspection report also highlighted the need to ensure that teachers adopt identical approaches in the teaching of letters and the sounds they make. There is a continued trend of improvement in phonics. Pupils' above national average achievement in phonics is testament to the effectiveness of leaders' actions in tackling this previously identified area for improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

A strong culture of safeguarding is evident in the school. Leaders ensure that pupils and their families receive the support and care they need. This includes effective support for those pupils with emotional needs. Staff are recruited safely and are well trained to spot and act on signs of risk or harm. Records show that any concerns are swiftly followed up and reported to the appropriate authority. Pupils feel comfortable in approaching staff if they have worries and are confident that teachers will sort out any problems quickly. Pupils are supportive of each other. Their close teamwork and partner work in lessons reinforce leaders' assertions that pupils behave well. Leaders record incidents of poor behaviour and put in suitable arrangements for those pupils who struggle with regulating their own behaviour to ensure that everyone's safety is not compromised.

The school's safeguarding policies and procedures are thorough and comply with the most recent government guidelines. The school's single central record is maintained accurately. Leaders' vigilance with pupil absence has led to improvements in attendance. Pupils' overall attendance is now above the national average for all pupils. Previously, there was a large gap compared to the national average in attendance of pupils in receipt of free school meals. This gap has closed so that it is broadly in line with the national average. Similarly, historically, the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has been below the national average. This is now in line with national figures. Pupils say they enjoy school.

Inspection findings

- Leaders are cultivating strong relationships with parents and the local community over time. For example, parents are welcomed into the school with their child from 8.45am and can support their child on the early morning tasks before school starts at 9.00am. The vast majority of parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, stated that they would recommend the school. A few parents who have recently moved from other schools stated how impressed they were with the school. They said that their child made good progress quickly. Most parents agreed that their

child is happy and well cared for. A few parents expressed concerns through free text that communication between the school and home could be improved. Leaders and governors recognise this and are looking at ways to improve liaison with parents.

- Since the previous inspection, leaders have focused relentlessly in continuing to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Their monitoring of teaching and learning demonstrates that improved teaching is having a positive impact on the good progress pupils make. Nonetheless, leaders recognise that, because of the good start teachers give children in the Nursery class, teachers need to expect even more of the children when they join the Reception class. Compared to the national average, too few current children leave the early years having exceeded expectations in reading, writing or number.
- Historic information about pupils' outcomes shows that, in the past, outcomes for boys and girls have varied across the curriculum. The school has been proactive in tackling this and its efforts to do so are beginning to pay off. In particular, boys' reading has improved to be in line with girls' reading in most cases.
- Previously, pupils' progress in reading was weak, particularly for the least able readers. Additional support has tackled this. Pupils use their good phonics knowledge to decipher unfamiliar words and speak with enthusiasm about the books they have read. The school's persistent drive to develop a love of reading has been successful in extending the most able readers. Pupils' attainment in reading at the end of Year 2 is broadly in line with the national average. By the time pupils leave the school at the end of Year 6, they make good progress to achieve above national standards.
- Good-quality teaching results in pupils exhibiting positive attitudes to learning. Work in books demonstrates that pupils take pride in their work across many subjects. Their self-marking and responses to teachers' comments reflect the care and pride they take in their learning. The school's 'three before me' approach empowers pupils to develop resilience when faced with a problem.
- School leaders have a very good insight into the progress of disadvantaged pupils in the school. Effective use is made of the additional funding to ensure that these pupils make good progress. Historically, few disadvantaged pupils have achieved the higher levels. The additional support the school provides is providing the challenge and catch-up that the most able disadvantaged pupils need. Similarly, disadvantaged pupils with lower starting points and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points in reading and mathematics in particular, because of the additional support they receive.
- Staff are skilled in checking pupils' progress. They use this information to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Scrutiny of work in books shows that teachers give pupils good guidance on how to improve, particularly in writing. Pupils respond well to teachers' suggestions and work well to help each other to improve. Teachers have high expectations that pupils write for purpose across all curriculum areas. This breadth of experience enables pupils to practise their skills and develop a flair for writing.
- The leadership of mathematics is strong. Leaders analyse information on pupils' progress and provide teachers with support and advice to meet the new curriculum requirements. As pupils build their skills and understanding, their outcomes are improving. Less-able mathematicians are catching up fast because of the strong

additional support they receive. Improved teaching is enabling more middle-ability pupils to go on to achieve high results. However, there is still a need to ensure that most-able mathematicians are receiving the challenge they need in class to achieve their best.

- Leaders have developed an effective curriculum to meet the needs of the pupils. Staff plan interesting lessons in a broad range of subjects such as design technology and science. This ensures that pupils achieve well across the curriculum. Pupils speak enthusiastically about their regular 'Sea School' lessons. The work produced as a result of these lessons is of an exceptionally high quality. Pupils gain a wealth of knowledge about sea creatures and local geography. They learn how to manage risks and to be safe. Moreover, in activities such as the beach clean, pupils gained an understanding of the impact we can have on our environment through the pollution we create. Pupils were proud to share their experience with the inspector about how they took part in this community event to make a difference.
- Leaders promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. The school's work makes a positive contribution to pupils' understanding of British values such as respect and democracy. The democratically elected school council represents its community well. It has been effective in raising funds for new playground equipment. When disagreements occur in the playground, pupils say that they help their friends to see the other person's point of view. All pupils who responded to the online questionnaire stated that their teachers help them to be friendly towards others.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers in the Reception class continue the good work started in the Nursery class to ensure that all children have the very best opportunities to excel in their learning
- teachers ensure that the most able mathematicians receive the challenge and support they need to achieve well.

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

During the inspection, I met regularly with you and the executive headteacher as part of a professional dialogue throughout the day. I also met with members of the governing body, including the chair and member of your senior leadership team responsible for early years, mathematics and English. I undertook observations of learning in lessons. I examined pupils' work across a range of subjects, ages and abilities. I listened to pupils reading aloud. Before the inspection, I examined a variety of documents on the school's website and scrutinised the summary of the school's self-evaluation. I also analysed a range of documentation including the school's own assessment information about the achievement and outcomes of the pupils, as well as safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. I took account of 19 responses to the Parent View online questionnaire, 14 responses to the staff questionnaire and 16 responses to the online pupil questionnaire.

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

- How effectively are leaders using the pupil premium funding to diminish the differences between disadvantaged pupils across the school and all pupils nationally?
- To what extent have leaders been successful in improving outcomes for pupils with lower starting points and for those who have special educational needs?
- How effective is the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school in enabling pupils to make good progress and achieve well in writing?
- How effective is the leadership in mathematics in supporting good teaching, learning and assessment to provide suitable challenge for the most able pupils?
- How do leaders, including governors, ensure a culture and ethos of high-quality safeguarding across the school?