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Miss Sarah Hodgson
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Dear Miss Hodgson

Short inspection of Sheriffhales Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 25 April 2017, 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 February 2012.

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 in September 2016, you have continued to build on and develop the welcoming and family-centred ethos of the school. You are well assisted by a united and hard-working team. All adults play a key role in promoting a good standard of education for pupils and providing high levels of nurture and support. Due to the small size of the school, staff have a detailed knowledge of all pupils. Carefully tailored provision is provided for all groups and individuals. As a result, pupils enjoy school, feel safe and achieve well. Parents, staff and pupils have very positive views of the school. As one parent put it, 'All the staff are friendly and hard-working; there is a great community spirit in the village largely due to the school being so inclusive.'

Pupils enjoy school and attend regularly. The curriculum provides a wide range of activities and opportunities to develop and extend not only literacy and numeracy skills, but artistic and sporting talents also. A range of visits, visitors and clubs provide memorable experiences for pupils. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on, debate and discuss thought-provoking issues through activities such as 'Think about it Thursday'. For example, during the inspection pupils were asked to consider 'Is it a good thing that Britain is multicultural?' Older pupils expressed their views on post-its, while younger pupils voted with 'yes' or 'no' answers. This sophisticated level of thinking has helped develop pupils' reasoning skills and levels of maturity,

together with extending their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. You have successfully addressed the key issues raised at the previous inspection. Pupils apply their writing skills in different subject areas and good levels of challenge are presented to the most able pupils. As a result, progress rates have improved in writing. In 2016, the proportions of pupils exceeding the levels expected in both key stages 1 and 2 were above the national average. Teachers convey learning objectives clearly to pupils and provide good levels of support and challenge to enable all groups of pupils to achieve well. Teachers have focused on improving their marking and feedback so that pupils receive clear advice, which they respond to, in order to improve their work. You have developed your wider leadership team effectively so that all staff play an integral part in improving outcomes for pupils.

While you and your staff have had considerable success in raising standards of achievement, particularly in reading and mathematics, there remains work to be done in further accelerating progress in writing, especially in the early years and key stage 1. Pupils make good progress but teachers' expectations are not always high enough, and inconsistent progress is apparent in some pupils' books. You and your leadership team have worked hard on introducing a new assessment system to track and monitor the progress of pupils across the school in reading, writing and mathematics. This process needs further filtering and refinement so that governors and staff have a clear understanding of the key headlines about progress across the school in different subjects for all cohorts and pupil groups.

Safeguarding is effective.

As the designated safeguarding leader, you ensure that pupils' well-being and safety is a collective responsibility. All staff and governors have received recent training. As a result, they have a clear understanding of what steps to take if they have a concern about a pupil. The 'look out book' ensures that all staff are kept informed about minor welfare concerns which affect pupils' emotional well-being. You have also revised the system for recording more serious incidents. Robust information is collected and records are stored securely. You seek advice or make referrals to external agencies, as and when appropriate, and log all actions taken. Due diligence is shown by you and governors when appointing staff to make sure that they are suitably qualified and vetted to work with children. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

Pupils feel safe and have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They have a good appreciation of the dangers of using the internet. Regular assemblies, lessons and set activities, such as 'crucial crew' for Year 6 pupils, help pupils develop their awareness of personal safety. Pupils feel confident that they can report issues to adults and that their concerns will be listened to. They say that bullying does not happen in school. Anti-bullying ambassadors have helped formulate and develop policies to protect pupils. Pupil voice is used effectively to ensure that policies are suited to pupils' needs and contributes to their well-being.

Inspection findings

- At the beginning of the inspection we agreed the key lines of enquiry to be considered during the day. To ascertain that the school remained good, one key line of enquiry was the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels, including middle leaders and governors. To this end, inspection evidence found that self-evaluation is honest and accurate. As headteacher, you have quickly recognised areas of strength and weakness within teaching and learning. School action plans are focused on tackling these weaknesses to improve provision and achievement further. Together with your leadership team, you carry out regular checks on the quality of teaching and provide coaching and support where needed. Teachers share and improve their practice by observing each other and visiting other schools. You work in close collaboration with local schools to check that teachers' assessments are accurate and reliable.
- You are ably supported by a small, but dedicated and proactive leadership team. Members lead their subject areas effectively, especially assessment, literacy and special educational needs. This makes a positive impact on whole-school improvement. Leaders have a good understanding of the new assessment system in place. They track the progress of all pupils and ensure that additional support is provided, where needed, through group work, one-to-one teaching or a structured intervention programme. This enables all pupils to make good progress, including the small number of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. While assessment information is collated for individuals, groups and cohorts by attainment, further work is needed to summarise this information in terms of progress, so that governors and leaders have an even more detailed view of achievement.
- Governors have a broad range of skills which they use well to support the school. They are not afraid to ask challenging questions, as evidenced in minutes from governing body meetings. Link governors visit classrooms and meet with leaders to gather first-hand information. This helps improve their knowledge and understanding of school life and they report back their findings to the full governing body. Governors have a good understanding of the attainment of different groups and cohorts but are less clear about the progress made by pupils, including children in the early years. This is because this information has not yet been filtered or summarised by leaders into a simple format.
- A second area we focused on was the attainment of children on entry to the school and provision for disadvantaged children. Inspection evidence shows that the majority of children join Reception Year with skills and knowledge which are typical for their age. They make good progress, especially in their communication and language skills and personal, social and emotional development, as they are integrated well with key stage 1 pupils. Good adult support is provided, with discrete teaching opportunities to meet all areas of learning within the early years curriculum. Good use is made of the outdoor learning environment to develop children's physical development. Outcomes at the end of Reception Year have risen steadily and an above-

average proportion of children reach the early learning goals. Disadvantaged children also achieve well and make good progress from their starting points. Learning journals capture regular and helpful assessments of children's early skills through photographs of activities and adult observations. However, some of these assessments are too cautious for individual children on entry to school and do not reflect what some children know and can do. This stifles the progress they are able to make as teachers do not build quickly enough on children's abilities. Progress information in the early years also needs summarising in line with the rest of the school so that leaders and governors have a complete overview of progress within this key stage.

- A further line of enquiry was based on writing, in line with your own school priorities. Although writing standards are at least in line with the levels expected for the majority of pupils, and are above average for some pupils, you have rightly identified writing as a development area this year. This is because progress in this subject is lower than in reading and mathematics and too few boys reach the higher levels. The writing process is developing well across the school but is more consistently taught and checked in key stage 2 than the early years and key stage 1. Pupils in key stage 2 use good vocabulary and imagery in their writing. Subject vocabulary is used well and pupils are taught to plan, draft and edit their writing to improve the quality. The use of writing for real purposes and audiences helps to stimulate and engage reluctant writers, including boys, and the added incentive of having their work published on the internet acts as an incentive for pupils to try their best. Cursive handwriting is evolving in key stage 1 but is not yet used consistently by all pupils. Similarly, common spelling errors for words such as 'what' or 'takes' are not reliably picked up by adults and this results in bad habits being formed. Books checked in key stage 1 show an inconsistent profile of progress. Some pupils make good gains over a number of weeks but then appear to regress. This is because staff expectations are not consistently high enough. Additionally, in Reception Year, some children adopt poor pencil grip and this inhibits their writing style and formation of letters.
- We also agreed to check the typicality of pupils' behaviour as a line of enquiry because there had been some historic fixed-term exclusions. I can conclude that pupils behave well. They are polite and courteous and display good manners. They remember to say 'please' and 'thank you' and hold doors open for visitors. They display positive attitudes to learning and there is very little disruption in lessons. Older pupils readily take on additional responsibilities including as digital leaders, on the school council and as house or vice captains. They also regularly help look after younger children at breaktimes. Pupils have a good understanding of and adhere fully to the school's behaviour policy. They particularly like the house point/dojo system in place and also the recently introduced 'shekels' scheme, which rewards good work and behaviour. Pupils spoke confidently about saving shekels individually or collectively as a class. They also outlined that shekels can be traded for money which can be donated to charity. All adults manage behaviour well. As a result, records checked show that there have been no

incidents this year and no exclusions since September 2015. Parents and pupils say that behaviour is consistently good.

- Since the previous inspection progress has accelerated, especially in key stage 2 in reading and mathematics. As a result, a much higher proportion of pupils exceeded the standards expected in 2016 both at the end of key stages 1 and 2. Current pupils are also making good progress. School's own information and work in pupils' books show that all groups, including the most able, make good progress. This is because staff have a detailed knowledge of pupils' abilities and provide the right level of support or challenge to ensure that pupils reach their potential.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- progress accelerates in the early years and key stage 1 in writing, with adults having high expectations of what children and pupils can achieve and consistently checking and addressing basic errors
- information about progress is summarised for all cohorts and groups, including early years, so that there is a clear picture of where further support is needed.

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

Yours sincerely

Heather Simpson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and members of your leadership team, representatives of the governing body and the school's local authority adviser. I discussed the work of the school with all leaders, including the achievement of pupils and procedures in place for safeguarding. I visited all classrooms, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at the work in their books. I listened to pupils read and talked with pupils at breaktimes to gather their views about the school.

I looked at a range of school documents, including minutes from governors' meetings and information about pupils' behaviour and attendance. I also reviewed the school's own evaluation of its work, together with the school development plan. I took account of the 22 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Additional information was collected from parents and grandparents at the end of the school day. There were seven responses to the staff questionnaire and the views expressed were considered.