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Mr Simon Botten
Headteacher
Blackhorse Primary School
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Dear Mr Botten

Short inspection of Blackhorse Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 February 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 January 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, your leadership team and governors share a clear vision that every child should reach his or her full potential. You work closely with your capable leaders to drive forward improvements to promote effective teaching and a stimulating curriculum. As a consequence, your school provides a happy and exciting place in which pupils can learn. When they leave Blackhorse Primary at the end of Year 6, they are well prepared for the next stage of their education. In 2017, the proportions of pupils achieving the expected standards by the end of key stage 2 were higher than national figures in reading, writing and mathematics.

Your commitment to providing a rich and rounded education can be seen in the wide range of enrichment activities and extra-curricular clubs on offer to pupils. Parents are very positive about the diversity of the enrichment programme, which has activities ranging from 'survival skills' to 'mindfulness'. Most pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, take part in at least one of the numerous clubs on offer, broadening their experiences and skills extremely well. Pupils praise the enthusiasm of their teachers in making learning interesting, typically commenting that, 'It's the best thing about this school.'

You have created a culture, shared by your staff, to continually look for ways to improve the quality of the education. An example of this is the new approach to teaching reading skills to enable more pupils to reach a high standard at the end of key stage 2. The positive impact of the new approach is evident, as pupils are making faster progress. However, you are aware that there is more to do in this respect.

You, together with your staff and governors, know your school well. You have an unwavering focus on improving the education of disadvantaged pupils and this is reflected in their faster rates of progress this year. You enhance the way the school supports these pupils to improve their learning and increase their self-confidence effectively. This work is resulting in better outcomes for these pupils.

You tackled successfully the areas identified as needing improvement from the previous inspection. Progress in writing increased rapidly in 2017, enabling a greater number of pupils to achieve the expected standard and beyond by the end of Year 6. You are further developing and improving teaching in mathematics to ensure that all pupils are suitably challenged and reach the highest standards. You provide high-quality training for staff to extend their skills and increase their effectiveness in meeting the requirements of the new mathematics curriculum. However, you acknowledge there is more to do to embed this successful approach to make certain all pupils are fully extended in their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your governors have created a strong culture of safeguarding within the school, making sure that arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of good quality. You check that policies and systems are followed and review them annually. Staff and governors receive regular training in the latest requirements for safeguarding, including how to keep pupils safe from extremism and radicalisation. Recruitment procedures for appointing new staff follow the statutory guidance stringently. The governor responsible for safeguarding checks regularly that the school's single central record is maintained accurately. Governors also check that staff are confident in reporting concerns about pupils, taking their views into account when updating policies and procedures.

Attendance rates are above national figures because of your keen focus on promoting regular attendance. You work well with other agencies, making timely referrals when the need arises. You follow up any absences diligently and attendance rates show improvement for the small number of pupils for whom this has been a concern.

The school goes to great lengths to maintain support for any vulnerable pupils and their families to ensure their ongoing welfare and safety. You are tenacious in following up referrals to ensure that you receive a satisfactory response. You work tirelessly to secure appropriate support for pupils whose behaviour gives rise to concern. Precise tailoring of the curriculum for these pupils ensures that their needs are well met, enabling them to be successful in school. This approach is effective in eliminating the need for exclusion.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I met with you to discuss the school's progress since the previous inspection. We agreed the following lines of enquiry: how effectively reading skills are taught to promote high standards in key stage 2; how well leaders use the pupil premium to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils; how successfully leaders

accelerate pupils' progress in writing and in mathematics in key stage 2; and how well the school keeps pupils safe.

- Reading progress in key stage 2 declined over the past three years to below average in 2017. In response, you have taken effective action to improve the teaching of comprehension skills. The coloured 'reading hats' approach helps teachers focus on systematically developing the more complex skills of reading.
- We saw the positive impact of this work in a Year 6 lesson. Pupils were able to pinpoint how the author used language skilfully to create a sinister effect in his description of a wood. The new range of high-quality books, both fiction and non-fiction, encourages pupils to read more widely. They talk enthusiastically about their reading and enjoy the level of challenge the new literature provides. Consequently, a greater number of pupils are on track to achieve and exceed the expected standard for their age by the end of this year.
- In 2017, disadvantaged pupils did not achieve as well as others, particularly in reading, and you reviewed your provision for these pupils in light of this. You monitor the achievement of disadvantaged pupils closely. Teachers plan detailed targets in each pupil's 'passport' to match work to individual needs, enabling disadvantaged pupils to catch up with others in school. You make good use of additional funding to provide intensive personal support to increase their confidence as learners. The clear impact of your actions is that these pupils' progress has accelerated this year and they are achieving as well as their classmates from similar starting points.
- During my visit, we looked at a range of written work across key stage 2. We agreed that, since the start of the year, pupils have made strong progress, writing at greater length with increasingly accurate spelling and correct use of a wide range of punctuation. Greater mastery of complex sentence construction and use of sophisticated language ensure that pupils' work is of high quality. For example, Year 4 pupils demonstrated an excellent command of technical vocabulary when writing explanations of earthquakes in geography. Current work in books shows that pupils are set to achieve high standards by the end of Year 6.
- Progress in mathematics has been broadly average in recent years in key stage 2. Since the previous inspection, you have implemented a new approach to teaching mathematics to ensure greater levels of challenge. Following extensive staff training, teachers are better able to set tasks that promote pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts. The work in pupils' books shows that, increasingly, teachers present pupils with problems that require deeper thinking in order to solve problems. However, you acknowledge that while the most able pupils are becoming confident in explaining their reasoning, this ability is not yet secure for all pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils continue to develop their comprehension skills in reading, to enable them to achieve the highest possible standards
- teachers continue to develop pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics by requiring them to explain their methods and thinking more extensively.

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

Yours sincerely

Sandra Woodman
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and discussed the school's self-evaluation, information about pupils' progress and improvements since the previous inspection. Together, we observed learning in classrooms and looked at a range of pupils' work in books. I listened to several pupils reading from key stage 2 and met with pupils to talk about their experience of school life. I held meetings with middle leaders and with four governors. In addition, I spoke with an external adviser who supports the school. I looked at a range of written evidence, including documents relating to safeguarding and attendance information. I took account of the written comments of 114 parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also took account of the views of 30 members of staff and the 121 pupils who returned the online questionnaires.