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Miss Liz Astley
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Dear Miss Astley

Short inspection of The Stoke Poges School

Following my visit to the school on 26 September 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 October 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 joined the school in 2014, on the retirement of the previous headteacher. Since then, you, your leaders and governors have worked diligently to maintain standards and improve aspects of the school. Parents are very positive about the changes you have made to the organisation of the school. They say that you are responsive and receptive when communicating with them. Staff praised the way that you have led improvements in the school. As one teacher said: 'The headteacher is incredibly supportive. We feel valued and listened to.'

At the last inspection, the inspectors asked for an improvement in the leadership of the school. Since then, there has been a substantial change in the membership of the governing body. Governors have made sure that they have a wider range of appropriate skills. These skills are used very effectively to support and challenge leaders' work. You, your leaders and governors have refined your approach to school improvement by making sure that the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans clearly show actions and outcomes, and focus on the impact on pupils' progress. You evaluate these improvement actions very well, so that you have an accurate and thorough view of the school's strengths and areas for further development.

Since joining the school, you have built a team of committed teachers and leaders who work well together. Your recently strengthened leadership team is well placed

to oversee the further changes you are making to the school. The training and support they are receiving is helping them to refine their leadership skills and carry out their roles proficiently. Staff appreciate the opportunities you have provided for them to visit local schools. This has allowed them to reflect on their own practice, share ideas and refine their skills. Consequently, pupils experience effective teaching which results in them making good and improving progress across the curriculum.

At the last inspection, the inspectors asked leaders to accelerate pupils' progress. It has taken some time to achieve this; however, pupils' progress has begun to accelerate. Standards in the early years have improved so that broadly average proportions of children now achieve a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year. Pupils' progress in reading and writing has accelerated, so that more pupils attain the expected and greater depth standard by the end of key stage 2 than in the past. Current pupils now make better progress in mathematics than previously. The progress of disadvantaged pupils is also more rapid, so that more achieve at least expected standards. However, you recognise that there is more to do to make sure that pupils achieve their full potential. Standards in phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) need to rise, and further improvements are necessary in spelling and boys' writing. Equally, pupils' progress in mathematics needs to accelerate further so that higher proportions achieve at least the expected standard.

Pupils' high standards of behaviour, which were recognised as outstanding at the last inspection, have been maintained. Pupils are exceptionally well behaved in lessons and around the school. They speak confidently to adults, work hard, and enjoy participating in the extra-curricular activities you provide, such as 'coding club' and 'gardening club'. Pupils are especially proud of the school's orchestra and choir. Parents were keen to tell me how well their children have settled at your school, praising the inclusive, family atmosphere you have created. Several parents told me how much they appreciate the high level of care which adults show towards pupils, singling out the work of your school's counsellor for particular commendation.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have made sure that pupils are looked after very well and are safe. Leaders and governors make thorough checks when recruiting new staff. You provide regular, comprehensive training in child protection. Staff know the signs that may indicate a child needs help, and speak confidently about how to report any concerns they may have. You keep accurate and detailed records which clearly show that you involve outside agencies promptly, when appropriate, so that pupils get the help and care they need.

The curriculum supports pupils' safety well. Pupils learn how to manage risks appropriately, for example how to cross roads safely or ride their bicycles in traffic. The pupils I spoke to all knew how to keep themselves safe, both online and in the community. They knew not to talk to strangers when they are outside and online.

Pupils told me that this is a friendly school and that bullying is rare. Pupils know that there is always an adult to talk to if they are worried about something.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, my focus areas were: how effectively leaders are improving the early years; how well teaching is helping pupils to make good progress in phonics and writing; how effectively teaching challenges the most able pupils in mathematics; and how well leaders are making sure that disadvantaged pupils make good progress and attend school more regularly.
- You have made sure that outcomes in the early years have improved since the last inspection, so that broadly average proportions of children now achieve a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year. Your assessment of children's starting points is now more accurate. The information you collect allows you to identify the skills children need to improve further. Consequently, this year, you have planned an interesting curriculum which focuses on quickly improving children's literacy, numeracy and fine motor skills. During my visit, I saw children enjoying the opportunities you have provided for them to develop these skills. For example, children wrote menus in the mud kitchen, counted bricks in the construction area and used scissors to cut out paper shapes.
- Parents of children in the early years told me that they appreciate the time teachers have taken to help their children settle into school. They especially like the new system for communicating children's progress, and the advice you have provided about how parents can help their child practise phonics. All these actions have helped to improve children's rates of progress but you recognise that there is more to do. Your plans for further improvement are well judged, including being mindful of the balance between teacher-led activities and activities where children learn by following their own interests.
- Pupils' progress in developing their phonics skills has been too slow. You recognise this and have made sure that improving this area is a key part of your development planning. Your leadership team has researched carefully how best to improve the teaching, learning and assessment of phonics skills. You have introduced a new phonics scheme and trained all your staff in how to deliver it, so that current pupils are now making faster progress in phonics than pupils in the past. You recognise the importance of close monitoring of phonics teaching to make sure that all pupils, particularly pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, reach the expected standard of the phonics screening check by the end of Year 1.
- You identified that pupils do not achieve well enough in writing. Your evaluation shows, accurately, that pupils' spelling is not good enough and that boys in particular do not make enough progress in writing. Your leadership team has made useful improvements to the curriculum to address these issues. There is now a consistent approach to teaching spelling throughout the school. You have also raised the profile of spelling so that pupils now recognise the importance of accurate spelling. There are early signs that this approach is working as pupils are taking more care with their spelling. One pupil told me he had just been

using a dictionary to check his work.

- To help boys make faster progress in writing, you have made sure that the books boys read motivate them to write creatively and imaginatively. You have planned activities which hold boys' interest so that they are eager to write. For example, in Year 5 pupils thoroughly enjoyed writing about Robin Hood's meeting with the Merry Men, from the point of view of different characters. Year 5 boys' writing was imaginative and lively as a result.
- Previously published results show that the most able pupils do not consistently make enough progress in mathematics. Over the last year, you have identified clearly what pupils, particularly the most able, need to do to make faster progress in mathematics. For example, you have ensured that problem-solving is taught more frequently with a particular focus on developing the skills of younger pupils. This is building pupils' confidence so that they more readily attempt harder work in mathematics than in the past. You have also made sure that pupils, across the whole school, are using resources to help them deepen their mathematical understanding. However, although you have introduced some more challenging work for the most able pupils, this is not consistent practice throughout the school.
- You have made sure that disadvantaged pupils make faster progress than they had previously. You have achieved this through improved tracking of pupils' progress which has allowed you to focus extra teaching on any pupil in danger of falling behind. In addition, the pupil premium mentor has helped to build disadvantaged pupils' resilience so that they are more confident learners. Governors monitor your work closely to make sure that the pupil premium is used effectively. Consequently, in 2017 the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, was higher than in previous years. The books of current pupils show that they are making similarly strong progress. You recognise that some disadvantaged pupils do not attend school regularly enough, so you are working effectively with outside agencies to make sure their attendance improves.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- recent improvements to the teaching of phonics, spelling and boys' progress in writing, lead to higher standards in writing and phonics across the school
- the most able pupils, in all year groups, are challenged consistently to make better progress and achieve more highly in mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Buckinghamshire. This letter

will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Old
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your leadership team and with governors. I talked on the telephone to a representative from Buckinghamshire Learning Trust. I visited a number of classrooms with you to observe pupils learning. I spoke to pupils during lessons and at lunchtime about their learning and experiences in school. With your phase leaders, I reviewed work in a range of pupils' books. I reviewed the 23 responses to the confidential staff survey. I talked with parents at the start of the day and considered 41 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I checked safeguarding arrangements. I reviewed the school's website and scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, the governing body's minutes and performance information.