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Mr G. Hobbs
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Dear Mr Hobbs

Short inspection of North Petherton Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 4 May 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 your school was judged to be good in March 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. There is no complacency. The restructuring of the school's senior leadership team has ensured that senior leaders understand clearly their defined roles and responsibilities. It has also enabled you to take a greater lead in supporting and challenging all who work and learn here to improve. Together with the strong governing body, you hold school leaders stringently to account for their work.

North Petherton Primary is a happy, welcoming school that fosters a love of learning in adults and children alike. Pupils' behaviour in and around the school is a delight. Corridors and classrooms are characterised by welcoming 'hellos' and beaming smiles. Pupils told me that they really enjoy coming to school and miss it when it is closed for the holidays. Your records confirm that attendance is high. This is because teachers and other staff make learning engaging. Lots of pupils came up to me during playtimes and in class keen to tell me what they thought and what they were doing. They are enthusiastic learners who want to share their achievements with each other and adults. You and the staff have ensured that pupils respect themselves, each other, their work and school. Books are scrupulously kept, there is no litter and everywhere is kept neat and orderly. Attractive wall displays are used to help support pupils' learning and celebrate their successes.

Since the previous inspection, the school has continued to improve. Pupils make good progress during their time in school and across all year groups. Children begin the Reception Year with broadly the expected skills and understanding; they leave with levels of development that are increasingly above those seen nationally. At the end of Year 1, a much higher proportion of pupils than nationally meet the expected standard in the phonics screening check. However, currently, the acoustic properties of the Reception and Year 1 classes, and surrounding areas, are poor. This is holding back some pupils from making better progress when learning phonics because they find it hard to hear and discriminate between different letters and the sounds they make.

Pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 has been at or above that of their peers nationally for the last five years, with the exception of the 2015 results for reading, which were slightly below average.

At the previous inspection, the school was asked to improve the use of assessment, targets and support for pupils in mathematics so that they could achieve their potential. Over the last five years you have worked hard with the leader for mathematics to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning matches that of the best seen in English. This has been done to good effect, so that the proportions of pupils making and exceeding the expected levels of progress in mathematics are now well above average.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's practice to keep pupils safe complies with guidance issued by the Secretary of State, set out in 'Keeping children safe in education', July 2015; all staff have signed to say they have read and understood the guidance. All staff have received appropriate safeguarding training. Staff are aware of their duties and are working with other agencies, for example to prevent potential radicalisation and extremism. Staff are aware of the mandatory reporting requirements that came into force on 31 October 2015. Safer recruitment policies are followed, fire drills are regularly held and risk assessments are detailed and bespoke. Pupils are supervised by a member of staff at all times during the school day. The school is tenacious at working with other partners and agencies to ensure those families whose circumstances make them vulnerable get the external support that they need.

Inspection findings

- Strong, determined leadership and management at all levels is enabling this school to keep improving. As a consequence, pupils are making increasingly rapid progress, with the school's data suggesting that the current Year 6 pupils are doing particularly well. Improvements in mathematics and in boys' writing reflect the successful actions taken by the school.
- Governors are astute and well qualified for the roles and responsibilities they undertake. They are kept well informed by staff, but also obtain first-hand evidence for themselves. They have a good knowledge of how to analyse and challenge the data and other information that is presented to them.

They have a good understanding about how and why additional funds for disadvantaged pupils and the sports funding are spent, including the impact that these funds have on raising pupils' achievements. They are very supportive of your work, but are nevertheless rightly probing and inquisitive and do not take things at face value.

- The new assessment systems that you are using are providing an increasingly rich amount of information about pupils' performance. You and your leadership team are using this information to hold teachers to account for their work and to provide speedier, carefully targeted support for pupils who are struggling in English or mathematics. Your analysis of the information has also highlighted where more work currently needs to be done, for example in boys' writing. The leader for English has listened carefully to the boys about what they think will help make writing more engaging and uses their ideas to inform curriculum changes.
- The emphasis this year has been on developing a more engaging and exciting curriculum, in particular to develop writing through different subjects. We discussed your current plans for a similar approach for mathematics to further develop numeracy across the curriculum. We also talked about how the curriculum currently limits the opportunity for pupils to develop their skills in control technology and in computer coding and programming.
- The school ensures that pupils are inspired and aspirational for the future. This has been achieved by, for example, holding celebration assemblies, by ensuring all Year 6 pupils take it in turns to have a role of responsibility, and by providing clubs, visits and out-of-school activities.
- Pupils said, and school records show, that bullying is rare and is swiftly dealt with if it occurs.
- It is all right to be different at this school: people are valued for their differences and uniqueness. Pupils agree with the adults in the school that derogatory language should not be tolerated; for example the use of the word 'gay' or other homophobic or racist language. The school community firmly believes in equal rights and pupils learn to be tolerant of different viewpoints.
- Close working relationships with other local schools ensure that:
 - leaders and managers can check the accuracy of assessments and the progress that pupils make with other teachers
 - the most-able pupils have regular opportunities to work with other gifted mathematicians in a local secondary school
 - children visit the school and get to know staff well in advance of joining the school in the Reception Year
 - pupils make smooth transitions into secondary education.
- The acoustic properties of the Reception and Year 1 classes, and surrounding areas, are poor.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the acoustic properties of the Reception and Year 1 classes, and surrounding areas, are improved, so that pupils can clearly hear what adults are saying, particularly when they are learning phonics.
- the curriculum is improved by:
 - providing opportunities for pupils to develop a wider range of skills when using computers, such as coding and programming
 - enabling pupils to develop skills in control technology
 - building on the best, imaginative, practice already in the school, for example in English, to make learning experiences for pupils more purposeful in other subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, other leaders, members of the governing body and parents. I spoke with pupils during lessons and at playtime. I scrutinised the quality of pupils' work in lessons and with the leadership team. I met with a group of Year 6 mathematicians. I also took account of the 44 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. A wide range of documentary evidence was considered, including records relating to safeguarding and assessment information.