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Mrs Vicky Barron and Mrs Heather Pilkington  
Co-Headteachers  
Sheepscombe Primary School  
Far End  
Sheepscombe  
Stroud  
Gloucestershire  
GL6 7RL

Dear Mrs Barron and Mrs Pilkington

### **Short inspection of Sheepscombe Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 1 February 2018 with, Lizzy Meadows, Ofsted Inspector, 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 April 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

There have been a number of changes in staffing, including leadership, since the school's last inspection. In addition, governance has changed. Governors are ambitious for the school. They are knowledgeable and realistic about the school's current effectiveness. They have readily engaged in working with the local authority to deal quickly with weaknesses. In September 2017, governors made the strategic decision to move to a system of co-headship. This has increased the capacity for change in the school but it is too soon to see the impact on pupils' progress.

Staff are wholeheartedly behind your leadership and are proud to work in the school. Parents and carers too are overwhelmingly positive. Pupils say they enjoy coming to school. They describe the school as 'a family' and enjoy their lessons, school trips and the clubs that the school provides.

Following the last inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that expectations from teachers and teaching assistants are consistently high to raise standards further. Increasingly, the impact of leaders' actions is bringing about improvement. In the last year, you have implemented improved systems to check pupils' progress. However, the school's data indicates that the rates of progress for current pupils continue to be too variable across year groups, especially in mathematics.

Over half of the pupils join the school later than in the Reception Year. Just under half of the pupils new to the school were previously in alternative education or have been taught at home. These pupils miss out on the good start provided in your early years setting. Here, children typically thrive, particularly in their phonic and reading skills, so that they are well prepared for Year 1.

Reading is the bedrock of this school. The high priority leaders give to the teaching of reading is particularly effective in developing pupils' love for it. More children achieve the higher standards in reading compared with those nationally at every key stage. Pupils' writing reflects the broad vocabulary they have acquired from the wide range of books they read. Leaders have created a strong culture of reading. Inspectors observed many pupils sitting quietly at breaktime, engrossed in their books.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You and your staff rightly place safeguarding pupils at the heart of your work. The administration of mandatory checks and pre-employment vetting arrangements is robust. Governors make regular checks to ensure that the school meets statutory requirements. Training is thorough and ensures that staff exercise vigilance in keeping pupils safe. They know what to do in the event of any concerns that pupils may raise. You are proactive in working with parents and know how to use external agencies so that vulnerable pupils and their families receive the support they need.

Pupils are happy in school and say they feel safe. Pupils of all ages work and play alongside each other contentedly. They know what to do and how to behave to stay safe in different situations. For example, pupils told me they must withhold personal information when working online. They have confidence in staff to resolve bullying should it happen, but say that it is very rare.

The governing body is resolute in its determination to keep pupils safe in school. Governors are active in making decisions to keep pupils safe or mitigate against risk. For example, access to the school buildings is suitably restricted. Inspectors observed a high ratio of staff to pupils at break and lunchtimes which ensures that pupils are safe.

### **Inspection findings**

- My first line of enquiry focused on the quality of teaching in mathematics. Standards in this subject have been weaker than in other areas over a number of years. They have often been below the standards achieved nationally. Too few pupils make good progress in this subject. Teachers do not enrich and deepen pupils' mathematical reasoning and understanding. Pupils in key stage 2 do not consistently use and apply what they have learned or know about mathematics in real-life situations. You recognise weaknesses in the teaching and provision in mathematics but, until recently, your staff team has not had the capacity to remedy them. Capacity has recently improved and you have made a positive start by implementing a whole school policy on calculations. However, it is too soon to see the impact of this work on pupils' attainment.

- Secondly, I explored how effective improvements have been in raising standards in writing. Improving the quality of writing has been a key feature of your school improvement planning. In particular, you identified that weak spelling was limiting the standards pupils achieve in writing. Standards are now rising. Improved teaching in phonics has led to pupils spelling words more accurately. As a result, more pupils are achieving the standards expected of them. However, for those pupils who join the school later than in Year 1, the success of plans to improve pupils' spelling is too variable. This spoils pupils' otherwise imaginative, interesting and thoughtful writing. In addition, you recognise that teachers' expectations of pupils' handwriting and its presentation are not high enough. Consequently, pupils, particularly those in key stage 2, do not take sufficient care in the presentation of their work. This becomes a barrier to them meeting expected standards in writing.
- Next, I looked at the effectiveness of the expenditure of additional funding such as the pupil premium and sports premium. You have drawn on national research to ensure that additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is effective in improving their progress. However, plans to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs lack precision. Too few pupils are catching up quickly enough. You have recently introduced a more rigorous approach to assessing pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding when they join the school. This is helping teachers to gain a timely knowledge of the level at which they need to pitch work. Currently, it is too soon to see the impact of this development.
- You have identified the link between some pupils' weak progress and their poor attendance. This was my final line of enquiry. You are working productively with parents and families to remedy this. Your actions are bringing about better attendance. Recent initiatives to provide a breakfast club have led to improvements in punctuality. The attendance of vulnerable pupils is improving. Furthermore, the number of pupils whose attendance is persistently low has fallen notably. However, you recognise that you need to do more to ensure that attendance is at least in line with the national average.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers make better use of what they know pupils can do and understand in mathematics so that more reach at least the standards expected of them in this subject
- teachers deepen pupils' mathematical knowledge so that pupils are competent in using it to reason
- teachers have the highest expectations of pupils' spelling, handwriting and presentation so that standards of writing rise and pupils achieve the rates of progress of which they are capable

- teachers provide precise support for those pupils who need to catch up so that their progress is accelerated
- the drive to improve pupils' attendance continues so that no child suffers disadvantage through weak attendance.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracy Hannon  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, inspectors spoke with you, other school leaders and a group of governors. I also met with a representative from the local authority. Inspectors made joint visits with you to lessons to observe pupils' learning and to scrutinise their work. We also conducted a joint book scrutiny of pupils' writing and mathematics books.

We considered a range of documentary evidence, which included the school's self-evaluation, local authority reports, school development plans and school performance information. We also looked at your analysis of pupils' attendance, behaviour and safeguarding documentation.

In addition, we took account of 24 responses to the Parent View online survey, and the free-text messaging service as well as meeting parents at the beginning of the day. We gathered the views of staff through an online questionnaire and through discussions during the inspection. In addition, we talked to pupils in lessons and at break and lunchtimes to listen to their views of the school.