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Ms Vanessa May
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Dear Ms May

Short inspection of Reckleford Community School and Children's Centre

Following my visit to the school on 16 March 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 November 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 have a clear vision for the school. You are transparent about its strengths and areas that need further work. You are working on the right aspects of improvement. Change on the governing body has brought about an increased focus on raising pupils' achievement. Together you are working determinedly to strengthen the academic achievement of pupils at the school.

There is a larger than average proportion of pupils who join and leave the school at times other than the usual transition points. You have effective systems in place to make detailed assessments of what pupils know and understand on entry. Teachers use these assessments effectively to plan for pupils. Consequently, these pupils make strong progress and settle into life at Reckleford well.

Clear systems are in place to ensure that pupils make as much progress as possible in their reading. You recognise that this maximises pupils' ability to access the curriculum on offer, particularly for those pupils who have limited acquisition of the English language on arrival to the school. Many volunteers assist in teaching and hearing reading at the school. This is making a discernible difference, but there is still more that can be done.

At the last inspection, you were asked to use pupils' progress information

consistently to ensure that teachers plan tasks that meet their needs so that more pupils reached expected standards, particularly in writing. Your work in this regard is taking hold well, but there is still more to do. While many pupils make rapid progress from their low starting points, fewer pupils in 2016 met the expected standard in writing than did in reading and mathematics.

For current pupils, their work in books shows that progress is often rapid. Consequently, more pupils are on track to meet expected standards this year. The vast majority of pupils who have not experienced interruptions across key stage 1 are writing at length and with increasing accuracy, representing rapid and sustained progress for these pupils. For the many pupils who join the school at other times, their progress in writing is good but some of these pupils still have a distance to travel before they meet expected standards.

Overall, current pupils' progress is good in reading, writing and mathematics. This is exemplified by current pupils' progress in Year 2. The vast majority of these pupils were working well below the standards expected for their age when they were in Reception; now in Year 2, nearly three quarters of pupils are on track to meet expected standards in writing, and well above this in reading and mathematics.

You were also asked to develop a system so that pupils in key stage 1 knew what they needed to do to make their work even better. This aspect is very effective. The school's feedback policy is now consistently applied.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a whole-school coordinated response to keeping children safe. Those leaders who are responsible for safeguarding actively engage with external agencies to minimise children's risk of harm. Their referrals are timely and followed up to check that everything is being done to keep children safe.

Pupils' emotional, social and academic needs are catered for well. Multi-agency support for the most vulnerable pupils is swift and wide ranging. The school uses early-help facilities and healthcare professionals' provision well to enable additional family support. Regular attendance checks enable leaders to keep a close eye on vulnerable pupils' well-being. Any concerns in this regard are followed up robustly.

Staff and governors have completed relevant and up-to-date training in line with current legislation. They articulate with confidence what to do if they have concerns, and talked explicitly about how they expect designated safeguarding leaders to provide feedback about the action they have taken to minimise risk. Governors have followed up on the outstanding actions from the annual safeguarding audit that the local authority necessitates. Consequently, procedures this year have been tightened. All staff vetting checks are carried out; however, some aspects of recording could be strengthened. Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and statutory duties met.

Inspection findings

To ascertain that the school remained good, a key line of enquiry focused on how well teachers use their assessments of what pupils already know in writing in key stage 1 so that pupils' progress is sustained and at least good. This is because writing outcomes have been historically lower than those achieved nationally over a number of years.

- Teachers use robust assessments well to secure improved achievement in writing. For example, those pupils currently in Years 1 and 2 who failed to meet the expected standard in writing at the end of early years are making strong and often rapid progress. As a result, pupils now write with greater confidence and stamina, and with accuracy in punctuation, phonics and spelling.
- A small group of lower attaining pupils still have a distance to travel before they meet age-related expectations. Leaders know that they need to foster pupils' independence as writers so that pupils have the resilience to keep going. At times, learning falters because pupils rely too heavily on the many adults on hand to help.
- Middle-attaining pupils make progress in writing. Teaching is enabling pupils to use punctuation accurately and to structure and organise their writing well. Pupils enjoy writing for a number of audiences and purposes that relate to their topic work and science. This is a particular strength. However, teachers do not insist that pupils routinely edit and improve their work. This aspect limits middle- and high-ability pupils from achieving work that is consistently above the standards expected nationally, of which they are capable.

My second line of enquiry was about how effective teaching is in the early years. This is because outcomes in the early years have been below the national average for the last three years but gradually rising.

- The environment in the Nursery is vibrant and inviting. Assessments of what children can and cannot do are regular and precise. Of particular note are the detailed observations you make that help you plan work to move children forward swiftly in their communication and literacy skills, and personal, social and emotional development. Teachers are helping some children whom you assess as ready to develop their skills in early phonics move forward in their understanding. These children are making rapid progress, but this approach has not been extended further so that more children enter the Reception class with language skills matched to their chronological age.
- Most children this year transferred to the Reception class and this has enabled a swift and effective transition.
- Teaching in the early years is typically good. Children enjoy the activities on offer and many show high levels of independence. Children are now making good progress in Reception from their different starting points. Leaders have prioritised additional teaching resources and funding to ensure that children get off to a good start and achieve consistently well. This is resulting in more children making accelerated progress so they have skills and knowledge matched to their age.
- Children are very proud of their writing. Children often make rapid progress in their writing because of the additional support they receive. Disadvantaged

children are making good progress. The classroom is filled with children's writing, showing that their contributions are valued and celebrated. Children told me that they enjoy writing about different things, for example about animals and castles.

- Children apply their knowledge of phonics to their early reading well. This is helping them get off to a good start to 'big school'. Additional support is on hand to support reading development, but leaders know more needs to be done to increase the proportion of children who read regularly at home.
- Adults know the children well and the work on offer does build on what children already know and understand. Leaders are determined to address the remaining weaknesses in children's personal, social and emotional development, and speaking skills, and know that assessment in these areas needs further work.

My final line of enquiry was about the impact of the school's systems to ensure that pupils' attendance is good, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

- Overall, pupils' attendance is just below the national average. Close monitoring by leaders and governors is improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. As a result, attendance for this group is good and above that of other pupils in the school. Any lower rates of attendance are being robustly tackled. Leaders coordinate the response of a range of professionals successfully. Weekly attendance reports and swift follow-up with parents when absence occurs result in attendance rates that are gradually improving. The proportion of parents who take their children out of school for extended holidays has reduced. Leaders and governors are working determinedly to bring pupils' attendance in line with or above national averages, but there is still more work to do.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- middle- and high-ability pupils in Year 2 routinely edit and improve their writing so that a greater proportion meet and exceed the standards expected nationally in writing
- in Reception, detailed assessment enables closer checking of children's speaking skills and personal, social and emotional development so that more children leave early years with skills and knowledge expected for their age
- pupils' attendance is consistently above national averages.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Carrington

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, senior and middle leaders, governors, and pupils. I also met with a representative of the local authority and with governors.

Together, we observed pupils' learning across the school, with a focus on writing development. I looked at work in books to establish the current quality of pupils' work and their progress over time. I also listened to pupils read. I scrutinised school documents, including the school's action plan and its school self-evaluation document. I also looked at records relating to behaviour and safety, attendance and safeguarding.

I considered four responses to the online survey, Parent View, and talked with parents. I also considered the views of staff through an online survey and meeting during my visit.