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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Simon Lusted
Headteacher
Lydbrook Primary School
School Road
Lydbrook
Gloucestershire
GL17 9PX

Dear Mr Lusted

Short inspection of Lydbrook Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 March 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 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, 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.**

The school has faced some challenges since the previous inspection. There has been a restructuring of staffing. You were executive headteacher across two schools but returned to the full-time headship at Lydbrook in 2016. Since your return, you have been successful in driving up standards in mathematics. The appointment of a head of teaching and learning has bolstered leadership capacity further and has increased the momentum of improvement. Most parents and carers are delighted with the school. One parent's comment, which was typical, read, 'Our children are enthusiastic about their learning and enjoy their time in school.'

The governing body has faced recruitment challenges. This academic year has been more settled. Recent appointments have strengthened the governing body. Governors are passionate about improvement and keep abreast of developments in education. Leaders, including governors, are focused on remedying the remaining relative weaknesses in the school's performance.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to embed the use of the new tracking system. Leaders and governors make effective use of the tracking tool to influence school improvement priorities. You were also asked to share the best teaching expertise within the school so that teaching becomes of a consistently high quality. You have rightly identified that there is more to do in this respect.

Pupils are proud of their school and said that they enjoy their learning. Together with staff and governors, you ensure that the school provides an inclusive and happy environment for all pupils. Central to the school's work is its focus on outdoor learning. The school is seen as a leading light in this respect. In addition, you are making good use of your work with higher education providers and educationalists. This is aimed at helping teachers to learn more about increasing pupils' resilience and self-belief. Pupils show good attitudes to learning. They work well together and do not give up easily. Typically, pupils are inquisitive about the topics being taught and they respond positively to teachers' questions and guidance. Compared to others nationally, a greater proportion of your most able pupils reach the higher standards by the time they leave the school.

A number of pupils travel to school by bus. You have worked determinedly to ensure that parents of these pupils are as able to engage with the school as those who live close by. Such is your resolve, that where parents are unable to visit the school, leaders and teachers hold regular meetings with these families in a venue closer to their homes.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils are kept safe at school because leaders have ensured pupils' safety and welfare is given a high priority. Leaders have created an ethos where staff are vigilant. Leaders make sure that staff are trained well to identify signs of harm. Pupils are taught well about how to keep safe in and out of school and online. Governors make careful and regular checks to ensure that the school is compliant in meeting its statutory obligations. Leaders are open to external scrutiny and follow guidance to ensure that staff appointments follow best-practice guidance.

Senior staff make appropriate decisions when deciding whether to report concerns about pupils' well-being. Careful records are kept of the decision-making process. Senior leaders ensure that they follow up communication with external agencies so that pupils and their families receive the support they need in a timely manner.

Inspection findings

- First, I looked at the effectiveness of teaching in the early years. In 2017, too few pupils achieved the early learning goals in reading and writing at the end of the Reception Year. In particular, boys did not achieve as well as the girls. Many pupils join the school with speaking skills lower than those expected for their age. Leaders' decision to offer places to two-year-olds in the Nursery is having a positive impact and children who recently joined Reception have better speech and are better able to access the curriculum. The quality of teaching in the early years is strong and is leading to improved rates of progress in reading and writing.
- The leader of the early years is using her in-depth knowledge of child development to provide children with a good start to school. Her work last year in the Nursery has set the foundations for further improvement. She has a motivated and skilled team who work effectively under her guidance. The

teaching of phonics is effective. It is helping children to read and spell with increasing accuracy. Boys and girls choose to write independently and concentrate well. The teachers' strong focus on developing children's skills in mark making has paid off. Children apply the correct pencil grip and are able to form their letters correctly. However, leaders recognised that there is still a need to provide additional support for the few children who need to catch up.

- Next, I looked at how leaders were driving improvements in the quality of the teaching, learning and assessment of pupils' writing. This is because writing outcomes at the end of the early years foundation stage have been low historically and many pupils do not catch up by the end of key stage 1. Although improving, too few pupils reach the expected standards by the end of key stage 1.
- Work in books and the school's accurate assessment information both show that the most able pupils sustain good progress and so reach high standards by the time they leave the school. However, too few of those pupils who need to catch up quickly in writing do so. Leaders are aware of this issue and have been partially effective in their efforts to improve pupils' rates of progress. For example, leaders have developed the curriculum by introducing topics that interest pupils. As a result, pupils have good attitudes towards their learning and are keen to write about what they have learned.
- The teaching of writing in Year 6 is consistently strong. Here, the teacher has high expectations and provides pupils with clear guidance on how to improve. Pupils follow this advice keenly and learn from their previous mistakes. However, this best practice is not mirrored across the school. In other classes, teachers' expectations of what those who need to catch up can do are often too low. Consequently, pupils with low starting points continue to struggle with their writing. In particular, too many pupils make errors in their spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Next, I explored how successful leaders have been in raising standards in phonics in Year 1. Too few pupils met the expected standards in phonics screening checks between 2014 and 2016, and in 2017 the proportion fell further. In addition, although improved from 2016, outcomes in 2017 saw too few pupils reaching the standards expected for their age in reading. Pupils had made slow progress since their Reception Year.
- Leaders have been relentless in tackling pupils' poor phonic knowledge. They have reviewed the strategies for teaching phonics and provided additional staff training and coaching. In addition, new books have been purchased so that the books pupils read match their phonic knowledge. Leaders make sure that pupils' phonic knowledge is carefully tracked so that teachers build on what pupils know, can do and understand. As a result, pupils are catching up and their knowledge of phonics is now secure. The number of pupils who have already met the standards, as set in last year's phonics check, has increased to be in line with the national average.
- Finally, I focused on pupils' attendance. This is because the school's overall absence figures have been too high over time. In addition, although improving, the number of pupils who are persistently absent from school remains too high.

You have raised the profile of attendance with families. This has supported some improvement in pupils' attendance. However, you recognise there is more to do to ensure that fewer pupils are persistently absent from school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide pupils who need to catch up in writing with the right support and challenge so that they achieve at least the expected standards, including in the early years
- teachers raise their expectations and strengthen the focus on improving pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar so that standards in writing continue to rise
- pupils make consistently good progress across key stage 1 in reading and writing
- they regularly review the strategies in place to promote good attendance, so that the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent continues to reduce

I am copying this letter to the chair 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

I met with you to discuss your evaluation of the school. I visited lessons together with your head of teaching and learning, looked at the work in pupils' books and spoke to the pupils about their learning. I also heard pupils read. Additionally, I looked at books and external reports. I also looked at information about pupils' attainment and progress. I spoke with four representatives from the governing body. I also held a telephone conversation with a local authority officer. I took into account the 30 survey responses from Parent View, the online Ofsted questionnaire for parents, as well as the eight responses to the staff questionnaire. I checked the effectiveness of your safeguarding and recruitment arrangements.