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Mr Jeremy Cooper
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Dear Mr Cooper

Short inspection of Appledore School

Following my visit to the school on 18 April 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 March 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Along with your deputy headteacher and governors, you continue to provide strong leadership for the school. Appledore school is inclusive and welcoming.

The welcome begins at the start of the day when parents and carers know that you and your staff will be there to listen to any concerns. Parents value the good quality of education and strong support that you provide for their children. One parent confirmed this by saying that teachers deserve a 'pat on the back', while others said their children are very happy coming to school. Another parent commented that issues are handled well in this 'well-disciplined' school. However, some parents expressed concerns on the online survey regarding the behaviour of some pupils. During the inspection, pupils were polite and respectful to adults and each other, both in lessons and around the school. Those pupils I spoke with agreed that behaviour is good and that they feel very safe in school. Staff overwhelmingly confirmed that pupils' behaviour around school is consistently managed well, and leaders effectively support them to do this.

Your focused and determined leadership sets the tone for the whole school community and your own high expectations are reflected in the work of the team. You have ensured that clear and robust procedures, underpinned by detailed and thorough record-keeping, are well understood by all. You and other leaders have high aspirations for the pupils. You hold challenging meetings with teachers to

ensure that pupils are receiving suitable interventions to help them succeed. As a result, pupils are motivated and well supported to make strong academic progress, often from low starting points.

Since the previous inspection, you have worked well to tackle the areas identified for development. Most significantly, you have developed pupils' writing skills more quickly and they make good progress across the school. Teaching assistants now support pupils' learning effectively and the progress of all groups of pupils is strong. Pupils who had been falling behind now achieve well, following targeted and focused interventions.

Another area for improvement in the previous report was to ensure that pupils are challenged more often in a wider range of subjects. You have re-evaluated your curriculum completely so that it is now a strength of the school. This is particularly evident in art, which has become a community focus for the school. Parents have helped complete an attractive art studio where teachers from other schools take part in professional development activities to extend their pupils' art skills. Young adults with learning difficulties also use the studio and are supported by your 'art ambassador' pupils to produce high-quality pieces of artwork, such as still life drawings.

You have ensured that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good, with some elements that are particularly strong. However, there are still some areas for you and other leaders to continue to tackle. These include refining how you monitor your assessment procedures. This is to ensure that the progress of individual pupils is assessed more accurately as they move across the key stages. In addition, pupils do not have a clear understanding of the systems in place across the school to help them if they find work too difficult. This results in a lack of resilience and slows the progress of some pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school, which looks after pupils' emotional, physical and mental well-being. Your learning mentor works closely with parents and pupils to ensure this. You and your governors ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are robust, effective and fit for purpose. Staff receive regular training and, as a result, know what to do to keep pupils safe.

Pupils say they feel safe and trust the staff in the school to look after them. They are happy and enjoy coming to school. They say that there is no bullying and that any 'rough play' is dealt with effectively by staff.

Attendance is broadly in line with the national average. Any absences are followed up rigorously, particularly persistent absence.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, my first line of enquiry looked at how teaching, learning and assessment support pupils to achieve well. You ensure that there is a flexible approach to teaching based on pupils' interests and needs. Teachers set pupils regular targets based on their individual starting points in reading, writing and mathematics. This ensures that teaching challenges the most able pupils, while supporting those who had low starting points.
- The early years environment is rich, vibrant and well resourced. Activities, particularly outside, are engaging and children clearly enjoy their learning. Children are actively encouraged to be independent and they are proud of their achievements. For example, some children loved explaining the tally chart they were making to count the number of flowers, sticks and other things they found in the woodland area.
- Basic literacy and numeracy skills are taught effectively in key stages 1 and 2. Classrooms are bright and informative and the wall displays support learning well. Writing skills are of a high standard from Nursery-aged children upwards. Pupils are generally confident readers who have good comprehension skills. They are able to show their understanding of mathematical concepts and can apply skills in problem-solving activities. As a result, progress is good. Where progress slows across the school, this is generally as a result of specific needs within particular classes.
- The curriculum is a strength of the school. Pupils are able to deepen their understanding in a range of subjects as a result of carefully planned topics that specifically link different areas of learning. Pupils' work across the curriculum shows that they can apply their literacy and numeracy skills in different subjects. Leaders take great care to ensure that basic skills in all subjects are developed progressively. This often leads to high-quality outcomes; for example, pupils practised a range of skills before producing excellent line drawings displayed in a school art folder.
- Pupils I spoke with, however, found it difficult to explain how teachers help them with their learning if they find the work tricky. Some pupils said they asked for help straight away, while others described what strategies they thought they had to follow, for example talking to another pupil. Not all pupils are resilient learners and some rely on teachers to tell them immediately what to do when work gets too hard. Other pupils understand they need a method to use to help themselves learn. Leaders have not ensured that staff have the guidance they need to support pupils to learn, which sometimes slows progress.
- My second line of enquiry explored how well the few disadvantaged pupils are making progress in comparison with their classmates. We looked at pupils' progress records and found that some disadvantaged pupils' starting points were very low. Progress was good overall but a small number did not achieve the standards expected for their age in writing. Disadvantaged pupils across the school make progress that is generally in line with other pupils because carefully planned interventions effectively support their learning.
- My third line of enquiry evaluated the reasons behind the less successful results

for pupils in key stage 1 in the 2017 tests. Pupils did not achieve standards expected for their age in reading, writing or mathematics, except for the most able pupils. This was in direct contrast with the early years outcomes, phonics screening check results and key stage 2 national tests. All of these were in line with, or above, the standards expected for their age.

- We discussed at length the considerable support that you put in place for this cohort throughout key stage 1. Intervention programmes to accelerate the progress of these pupils and additional adult support were effective in challenging the most able pupils to achieve above-average standards. However, the particular circumstances of this class at the time resulted in not enough pupils achieving the standards expected for their age by the end of Year 2.
- One area for discussion was the accuracy of assessment and its consistency across the key stages. You and your senior leaders readily agree that you need to continue the focus on assessment to ensure that you can identify any dip in standards at an earlier stage. This includes revising assessment procedures from early years to the end of key stage 2 to ensure that there is clear progression through the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- assessment systems across the school consistently evaluate the progress pupils make across key stages
- teachers support pupils more effectively to develop resilience when attempting difficult tasks.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Jane
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I visited all classes with you to observe teaching and learning. I reviewed pupils' books, covering a range of subjects, to consider the standard of work and the progress pupils are making. I talked to pupils of all ages at different times of the day and listened to some pupils read.

I held meetings with you throughout the day, sometimes with your senior leaders. I also met with members of staff and governors to discuss the school's work. I talked

to the school's improvement partner on the telephone. I reviewed a range of documentation, including policies, safeguarding documents, the pupil premium strategy, assessment information and your school self-evaluation and improvement plan.

I took account of the 52 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, as well as the 31 free-text comments. I spoke to some parents informally at the start of the day. I also took into account the written responses of the 14 staff who completed the staff survey.