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Mr Iannis Ireland
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Ireland

Short inspection of Starcross Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 25 April 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 February 2013.

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 continued to develop the school's facilities productively since the previous inspection. As a result, pupils experience a stimulating range of experiences both inside and outdoors that promote their enjoyment of school and good engagement in learning.

Pupils behave well and their supportive relationships with adults and with each other help them to learn and reflect the school's motto, 'Love school, love life'. When questioned, pupils proudly commented, 'We wouldn't change anything. Our school is wonderful.' These views are strongly supported by staff and by the vast majority of parents in their questionnaire responses.

In recent years, you have restructured the roles of senior and middle leaders to establish a strong and united leadership team. Leaders at all levels understand their roles and help to drive improvement across the school. Starcross continues to be an inclusive school where pupils from a wide range of starting points, including an above-average number who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are supported well. You have improved procedures for assessing pupils' skills and strengthened the teachers' ability to quicken pupils' progress. For example, leaders and teachers now have more accurate information about pupils' learning. This helps them recognise those pupils in danger of falling behind and to provide earlier support to prevent this from happening. You recognise the need to sustain this early

intervention to help all pupils, especially those with lower starting points, make equally rapid progress.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to engage pupils more in their own learning and asked to improve the way you plan and bring about school improvement. You have addressed both issues successfully. This is evident in the way pupils eagerly contribute to learning during lessons and in your accurately focused school improvement plans. Your ability to target the right priorities and bring about improvement is seen, for example, in children's increasing achievements in Reception and in rising outcomes, especially in reading, at the end of Year 6.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's leaders, including governors, ensure that all safeguarding arrangements and procedures meet the statutory requirements and are fit for purpose. They include keeping staff and governors' training up to date so that all who work in the school know what is expected of them and keep pupils safe.

School leaders and staff know the pupils and their individual circumstances well. Leaders and staff communicate effectively with parents and, as necessary, with outside agencies. The school is diligent in keeping a watching brief over pupils considered vulnerable and in checking that pupils who have transferred to other schools continue to be well supported.

Most parents and all the staff and pupils who responded in the questionnaires would recommend the school to others. They feel that pupils are kept safe and happy and are taught and learn well. Families new to the school value the way they have been warmly welcomed and supported.

Inspection findings

- Our first key line of enquiry examined the effectiveness of teaching and learning of phonics and reading in Years 1 and 2. This is because the proportion of pupils reaching expected standards in phonic screening checks and reading assessments in key stage 1 has been below average in recent years.
- You have given high priority this academic year to strengthening teaching and securing pupils' good progress in phonics and reading. You have used local authority training opportunities to develop staff's skills and strengthen the way phonics is taught. We identified that both teachers and teaching assistants now effectively develop pupils' understanding of the different sounds that letters make. As a result, the pupils' ability to pronounce letter sounds and tackle new words when reading matches that expected for their age. Parents who spoke to me commented on the increased focus given to reading. They welcomed the guidance they receive from staff to support their children's reading at home and noted their children's much improved progress.
- Our second line of enquiry investigated what leaders and teachers are doing to quicken pupils' progress in mathematics and writing across key stage 1. This is

because results in Year 2 assessments in 2016 were not as strong as you had hoped.

- In mathematics, teachers have raised the level of challenge in the work they present to pupils and have quickened their progress. We observed that pupils' responses in class and well set out work in books also reflect faster progress. We identified, though, that weaknesses in the basic numeracy skills of some pupils still impede the development of their mathematical understanding. Your improvement plans rightly prioritise the need to embed these skills more securely.
- In writing, pupils are making good progress in constructing sentences using a wide range of vocabulary. Pupils respond well to interesting topics, for example describing and writing about how to wrap and package Easter eggs safely. You are taking steps to improve pupils' handwriting and the way they present their work. You know that these aspects need strengthening to develop pupils' confidence and fluency in writing fully.
- Our third key line of enquiry examined how well leaders and teachers ensure that all pupils make equally rapid progress through key stage 2. This is because the progress of a small number of disadvantaged pupils, and some who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, has not been as positive as that of other pupils in recent years.
- You and other leaders, including governors, have strengthened the way additional funding is used to assist pupils across the range of needs. Together, you ensure that disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported. Teachers and teaching assistants work effectively together to tailor guidance to pupils' differing emotional and academic needs. As a result, these pupils rapidly develop self-confidence and are increasingly making faster progress.
- Our enquiries also identified that other pupils across the range of ability engage enthusiastically in practical activities and most are making faster progress in learning how to solve problems. We noted your strengthened focus on improving the calculation skills of pupils who find learning difficult. However, we identified limited opportunities for pupils to develop mathematical skills when learning in other subjects. Pupils make good progress in writing, as for example in history, describing Howard Carter's discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb. Sometimes, as in key stage 1, improvements in pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar are clouded by weaknesses in handwriting and presentation skills.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers more securely develop pupils' numeracy and calculation skills, including the ability to apply and extend these skills across the range of subjects
- teachers give more emphasis to the development of pupils' handwriting skills and set consistently high expectations for the presentation of pupils' written work.

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

Alexander Baxter
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and with the other staff with leadership responsibilities. I also met with members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I visited classrooms with you and together we scrutinised samples of pupils' work in books. I talked with individual pupils and support staff during the morning and lunch breaks. In addition, I met several parents as they brought their children to school. I examined a range of documents relating to safeguarding, pupils' attendance, progress and school self-evaluation and development. I took account of 57 responses to the Ofsted online Parent View survey and additional parents' written comments. I also took note of eight responses to the staff questionnaire and responses from 14 pupils to their questionnaire.