

12 March 2018

Mr Martin Higgs
Headteacher
Alverton Primary School
Toltuff Crescent
Alverton
Penzance
Cornwall
TR18 4QD

Dear Mr Higgs

Short inspection of Alverton Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 February 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in June 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your strong leadership and close partnership with the deputy headteacher underpins an effective collaborative approach to leadership and management. Leaders at all levels work successfully as a united team to provide a wide and interesting curriculum that helps pupils thrive both personally and academically. As a result, the school has gone from strength to strength in recent years with, for example, more pupils now making good progress in writing and mathematics.

You and other leaders, including governors and academy representatives, check the performance of the school effectively. Your development plans identify the right priorities for improvement and show that you know the school well. You are taking well-founded steps to drive the school forward. You have, for example, established high standards in mathematics. You have transformed the outdoor learning facilities to create stimulating learning experiences for all pupils, especially children in early years classes. These developments evidence your secure capacity to bring about further improvement.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are strong. They are keen to do well and enjoy working together. Pupils say that 'teachers make learning interesting and fun.' Pupils listen carefully to adults' guidance and move swiftly into their work. Consequently, almost all pupils sustain high standards of behaviour and make at least good progress to

achieve well. Pupils make good progress in writing and especially strong progress in mathematics. You have recognised that pupils' achievement in reading has not been as strong. You have, rightly, made reading a key priority and already there are substantial improvements in pupils' achievement across the school.

Almost all of the parents and carers who responded to the online survey, Parent View, would recommend the school to other parents. One parent wrote, typifying the views of others, 'My children are extremely happy at school. I am very pleased with the progress they have made throughout their time at school and with the care they have received. My children are challenged without feeling pressured and I have always felt that each class teacher really gets to know my children.'

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors and representatives of the trust, sustain a strong culture of safeguarding and ensure that procedures are fit for purpose. Everyone I met with during the inspection identified securing pupils' safety and welfare as a key priority. Staff receive regular training to ensure that they are well equipped to undertake their safeguarding duties effectively. Staff know pupils well, and this aids them in swiftly recognising and dealing with concerns about pupils' safety and welfare. Leaders make sure that the continued improvement of the school's indoor and outdoor facilities includes full consideration of safeguarding requirements. For example, they have commissioned a full audit of health and safety processes and are swiftly implementing recommendations from this review to further improve practice.

Leaders and staff work effectively with parents and a range of external agencies when making referrals about concerns. As headteacher, you are persistent in your efforts to make certain that other agencies take the necessary action to protect vulnerable children. This is especially the case in your efforts to follow up and reduce persistent absence. You also provide a strong lead in ensuring that schools and external agencies across the locality communicate more effectively together to keep pupils safe. Pupils say that they feel safe and secure in school. Pupils also show a good understanding of how to stay safe and keep others safe when using the school's facilities, for example as elected ministers of the school parliament. Parents are appreciative of the way staff care for their children.

Inspection findings

- National assessments at the end of Year 6 in 2017 showed that in reading some pupils, especially those with high prior attainment at the end of Year 2, did not progress well enough to achieve the standards of which they were capable. Consequently, this inspection's first line of enquiry examined the work of leaders and teachers to quicken pupils' progress and raise attainment in reading, especially across key stage 2.
- Pupils in all classes are responding well to the raised emphasis now placed on the development of their reading skills. When questioned, pupils say that they are

enthused by the increased range of reading books available in classrooms and in the upgraded school library. Pupils also say that they are more interested and committed to reading, both at home and in school.

- Additional initiatives, such as the current emphasis on extending pupils' vocabulary, are rapidly improving their reading and comprehension skills. Pupils are responding well to increased opportunities to read and discuss texts in class and when receiving additional adult support as individuals or in small groups. For example, pupils in Years 5 and 6, especially the most able, responded well to the teacher's challenging questions by explaining how the author Robert Swindells created suspense in his 'Room 13' novel. School assessments of pupils' progress and observations of pupils' reading show their rapid progress. Currently, an increasing number of pupils demonstrate skills that are higher than expected for their age. You rightly acknowledge that this strong focus on reading has not yet been sustained long enough for all pupils to achieve consistently well.
- Pupils have generally attained above-average standards in writing by the end of Year 6, but standards in spelling, especially those attained by girls and disadvantaged pupils, lagged behind in 2017. Hence, the next inspection focus was to look at what leaders and teachers have been doing to improve pupils' ability to spell words accurately. Teachers motivate pupils to write, both descriptively and imaginatively, across a range of subjects through, for example, topics such as 'Polluters or Protectors'. When questioned, one pupil said, 'I love the topics we study to support our learning in mathematics and English.' This reflected the views of others.
- There is variation, however, in the guidance that teachers give pupils about spelling both orally and through displays and learning aids such as dictionaries. Scrutiny of pupils' written work shows that their spelling is a weaker aspect of their writing. The frequency of misspelled words shows inconsistency in the degree to which teachers stress the importance of accurate spelling. At times, spelling mistakes mask the otherwise high quality of pupils' written work.
- The inspection also focused on the work of leaders and teachers to improve the phonic understanding and early reading skills of disadvantaged children and some boys in early years and Year 1 classes. Staff in the Nursery and Reception classes liaise supportively with the privately run nursery on site. This is helping teachers to identify and successfully target pupils' different needs, such as in speech and language, at an earlier stage. Also, additional adult assistance in early years and Year 1 classes has strengthened the teaching of phonics and reading. Much-improved indoor and outside learning opportunities are also stimulating the confidence and success in the learning of disadvantaged pupils and boys as well as girls. As a result, standards in phonics compare well with those found nationally, and boys and disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as their peers.
- Finally, I examined the work of leaders and teachers in raising pupils' attendance and reducing persistent absence. Pupils' overall rate of attendance is now in line with the national average and represents steady improvement in recent years. In particular, your resolute actions to reduce persistent absence and holidays taken during term time have been notably effective. This improvement reflects your

determination and the supportive work of the parent liaison officer to ensure that poor attendance is not a barrier to learning for any pupil, especially those considered vulnerable. Initiatives such as the breakfast club and helping disadvantaged pupils to participate in after-school clubs mean that all pupils can take advantage of what the school has to offer. Your detailed monitoring of absence and strident efforts with parents and outside agencies to stress the importance of pupils not missing learning continue to prove beneficial.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers sustain the focus on helping all pupils widen their vocabulary and achieve at a greater depth in reading
- the teaching of writing also includes the secure development of pupils' ability to spell words accurately.

I am copying this letter to the joint chairs of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cornwall. 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 the deputy headteacher. I also consulted with the other staff who have leadership responsibilities. I met with governors, the chief executive officer and trustees of the multi-academy trust. I visited classrooms with you and the deputy headteacher. We collected and scrutinised samples of pupils' work in books. I talked with individual pupils during visits to classrooms and listened to the deputy headteacher hearing pupils read and talking to them about their reading. I observed lunchtime arrangements and talked with pupils and support staff. In addition, I examined a range of documents relating to safeguarding, pupils' attendance, pupils' progress and school self-evaluation and development. I took account of 60 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, and 58 additional written comments from parents. I also took note of 22 responses to the staff questionnaire.