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Mrs Gill Gillett  
Headteacher  
Southmead School  
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Devon  
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Dear Mrs Gillett

### **Short inspection of Southmead School**

Following my visit to the school on 23 May 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 March 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 continue to deal effectively with the higher than average proportion of pupils that arrive and leave your school at different points during each year. We explored in great detail how this has a significant impact on the published assessment information for the school. Leaders and staff know the school and its pupils very well. There is strong evidence that, together, you and your team work tirelessly to make a significant difference to the lives of your pupils.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to increase pupils' progress in writing. You have developed a range of strategies to ensure teachers have high expectations for the quality of pupils' writing across all subjects. As a result, work in pupils' books, and on display around the school, is of a high standard. Teachers provide pupils with opportunities to write for a range of different purposes. Just a few of the many examples seen during the inspection include: pupils developing their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding by writing their own reflections from assemblies and, in history, pupils writing about life in Britain before the Romans invaded. Pupils' handwriting is of a high standard and they write in a legible style.

Southmead Primary School is a school that understands both the educational and social and emotional needs of its pupils very well. Staff carefully provide learning that not only inspires pupils but allows the vast majority of them to make good progress. Pupils are inquisitive about the topics taught and appreciate how hard staff work to make learning fun. One pupil that I spoke to said, 'I like my school because teachers do the best they

can to help us learn.' Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Almost all of the 66 parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, would recommend the school to other parents. This is typified by one parent who commented, 'My child has had a hugely positive experience since starting the school. She loves going to school and is inspired to learn and participate every day. The school creates a caring, safe, enjoyable environment with friendly faces everywhere.'

Pupils' behaviour in and around school is exemplary. They follow the school rules and show respect for each other's opinions and ideas. Pupils are motivated to do their best and, as a result, make good progress from their starting points.

Leaders, including governors, use assessment information accurately to identify the school's strengths and areas for development. Governors are knowledgeable about the work of the school. They hold senior leaders to account for all aspects of the school's performance, including the use of funding to support disadvantaged pupils. However, governors do not analyse the performance information available to them with sufficient rigour and this limits their understanding of the impact new initiatives are having on pupils' progress.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

School leaders are committed to keeping pupils safe. All relevant training for staff and governors is up to date and staff understand the procedures they need to follow if they have a concern about a pupil. Staff have a good knowledge of their pupils and families and are protective of pupils who may have particular challenges. Recruitment and vetting checks are completed for staff and volunteers before they start work at the school. Governors also play a key role in ensuring pupils are safe. They monitor the actions of the school to ensure safeguarding is effective. However, the new procedure for carrying out pre-start risk assessments is not yet fully in place.

Pupils report that they feel safe in school and have the confidence to approach a member of staff if they are worried or have a concern. During the inspection, pupils described in great detail how the school helps them to stay safe both in and outside school and when using information technology. The vast majority of parents who completed the inspection questionnaire also reported that their children were safe at school and well looked after. One parent explained, 'Southmead is a caring school and I am in no doubt that my children would be listened to should they ever have a problem.'

### **Inspection findings**

- The 2016 Year 6 published assessment results highlighted that too many pupils had not made the progress they were capable of in writing. This formed the basis of my first line of enquiry. You demonstrated an in-depth understanding of the challenges you are presented with and clearly explained that only 57% of the 2016 Year 6 cohort had been in the school since Year 2. This had had a significant impact on the published information.
- Leaders have a detailed plan in place to enable current key stage 2 pupils to make better progress in writing. Teachers use the school's assessment system to skilfully

identify gaps in pupils' learning and plan personalised learning sequences. This results in pupils, particularly boys and girls who have low starting points, making good progress over time. Work in pupils' English books, topic books and on display around the school is of a high standard and demonstrates that initiatives are making a difference. Leaders also carry out a range of monitoring activities to ensure that new initiatives are having a positive impact. However, teachers do not routinely encourage the most able pupils to use a more varied range of punctuation and this limits the proportion achieving a higher standard in writing.

- My second line of enquiry focused on the progress that pupils in key stage 1 make in reading, writing and mathematics. We focused on girls with a starting point that is expected for their age. You have provided staff with time to further improve their knowledge of the key stage 1 curriculum and end of year expectations. Staff regularly moderate pupils' work to gain an accurate picture of the progress each pupil makes. Teachers then carefully construct learning sequences so that all pupils develop the secure knowledge, understanding and skills they need to make good progress.
- Leaders have made sure that staff plan and deliver enjoyable activities which challenge pupils to think deeply about their learning. The school's assessment information and evidence in pupils' books shows that pupils, including girls who have a starting point expected for their age, are making good progress in English and mathematics. Leaders must now ensure that these improvements are sustained so that the percentages of pupils achieving both the expected standard and higher standard are at least in line with, if not higher than, national averages.
- The next area I reviewed was the impact of leaders' actions to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils. The effective support provided for disadvantaged pupils is enabling them to make good progress and catch up with other pupils in the school. You clearly know and understand the needs of every pupil well and support them through a range of carefully planned learning sequences. You also put interventions in place to support their social and emotional needs. Funding is used for pupils to attend children's university sessions and raise their aspirations. This is having a positive impact on the progress they are making in their reading, writing and mathematics.
- You use your pupil premium funding wisely to ensure that disadvantaged pupils achieve well. The school's current progress information accurately confirms that this group are continuing to achieve well and are on track to achieve the national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. However, too few disadvantaged pupils are currently on track to achieve the higher standards in key stages 1 and 2.
- In the 2016 Year 1 phonics screening check, the percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving the expected standard was significantly below the national average. Interventions put in place to address this issue are having a positive impact. These include updating reading resources and introducing reading events which encourage a love of reading. As a result, the percentage of current Year 1 disadvantaged pupils who are on track to achieve age-related expectations is above the 2016 national average. When listening to disadvantaged pupils read it was evident that pupils are reading age-appropriate texts which are developing their phonics skills.
- My final line of enquiry focused on pupils' attendance. We explored why the most recently published attendance figures indicate that absence and persistent absence is too high for particular groups of pupils. Senior leaders have planned thorough actions

for improvement and the members of staff responsible for attendance work tirelessly to improve attendance. Staff follow the school's absence procedures and collaborate with outside agencies and the local military base to support families. Consequently, current school attendance information is showing marked and sustained improvement for all groups of pupils.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers consistently provide the highest levels of challenge to ensure that all pupils, and especially the most able, achieve the standards of writing they are capable of
- governors analyse assessment information to fully evaluate the impact of new initiatives on pupil's outcomes
- current improvements across key stage 1 are sustained so that all groups of pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their learning.

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

Craig Hayes  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, your deputy headteacher and other senior leaders. We talked about the improvements which have been made since the last inspection. Together, we visited lessons and carried out a learning walk. We looked at a sample of books from across the school. I also held discussions with four governors, including the chair of the governing body, and talked to pupils. I held a telephone conversation with an officer from the local authority. A wide range of documentation was looked at, including the school's evaluation of its own performance and information relating to the outcomes for current pupils. I also checked the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements and attendance information. I listened to seven pupils read. I took into account the 66 responses to Parent View, and considered additional comments received from parents.