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Mr Adam Croft
Headteacher
Charles Darwin Community Primary School
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Dear Mr Croft

Short inspection of Charles Darwin Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 2 March 2016, 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 school was judged to be good in March 2011.

This school continues to be good.

You are passionate that Charles Darwin Community Primary School should be a place where 'learning is a joy'. Pupils, staff, governors and parents believe that you are successful in this mission. The calm, purposeful and positive atmosphere in the school emanates from your determined leadership. You explained to me that 'people matter most' and everyone I spoke to at the school concurred that this principle is lived out every day at Charles Darwin. You and your staff always ensure that you listen to feedback, celebrate success and notice when a pupil or a member of their family needs some extra support.

Your well-judged actions and relentless approach to school improvement have been effective in raising achievement since the previous inspection. Pupils continue to make consistently excellent progress and attain high standards in mathematics. You have successfully focused on improving reading, which was the principal area for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Teachers encourage and celebrate reading; standards have risen and the vast majority of your pupils leave Charles Darwin well-equipped for secondary education. Your focus is now on improving writing: your staff are united in their work to ensure that pupils develop a wide repertoire of writing skills. You have researched approaches to improving writing and adopted a system to best meet the needs of your pupils. This typifies your approach to school leadership: you consider options carefully, make reasoned choices and ensure that your staff have the training and support to make sustainable improvements.

There have been several changes of staffing, including at senior leadership level, since the last inspection. You have managed these transitions effectively and ensured that there is a cohesive team in place to take the school forward; there is a consistency of views among your leaders about the school's priorities and how they should be achieved. You realise the potential leadership qualities of your staff and provide them with good opportunities to hone their skills, as exemplified by two teachers who are currently leading an initiative to improve the impact of homework.

The school is bright, friendly and inviting. You have made the most effective use of limited space and created an environment which celebrates the richness of your pupils' learning as well as their understanding and respect for people of different cultures. The school is rightly held in high esteem by the community and the local authority. You willingly share with other schools the effective practice that has been developed at Charles Darwin, for instance in how to close the gaps between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's safeguarding policies and procedures meet requirements. There is a culture of caring vigilance at Charles Darwin. School leaders take their responsibilities with regard to safeguarding very seriously and ensure that appropriate checks are made when staff are recruited. Safeguarding is clearly recognised as being everyone's responsibility. The school's policies are published on its website and are compliant with government guidance. Staff and governors are well trained in child protection and they rigorously ensure that pupils are taught how to keep safe, including when they are online. You have ensured that staff have completed relevant training on the 'Prevent' duty so that the school community is alert to the potential dangers of extremism and understands the steps to be taken in the event of any concerns being raised. Those pupils in Year 6 who have been appointed as junior safety leaders are committed to their role and provide briefings on keeping safe during assemblies. All pupils, staff and parents who responded to the inspection surveys agreed that the school is a safe place to be.

You have considered the implications of the expansion of the site with regard to pupils' safety and have planned appropriate actions to minimise risk.

Inspection findings

- The school's work to address areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection has been successful. Reading has a high profile across the school and most pupils make at least expected progress over time in developing their reading skills. Pupils enjoy reading a variety of texts and teachers are continually alert for new opportunities with which to challenge them.
- Pupils' achievement in mathematics is outstanding due to very effective teaching which enables them to develop mathematical reasoning. Your pupils see themselves as capable mathematicians and willingly explore with each other the best ways of solving problems. They see making a mistake as being helpful 'so long as you learn from it'.

- Although pupils' attainment is high, their progress in writing is not as strong as in other subjects. You recognised the need for a whole-school approach to driving improvement and embarked on a long-term writing project which is having a positive impact on pupils' ability to orchestrate their ideas and to write with increasing levels of accuracy. You decided to adopt your chosen strategy after considering different alternatives and are now at the point of amending your approach to ensure that pupils become fluent and versatile writers by the time they leave Key Stage 2.
- The most-able pupils do well at Charles Darwin, especially in mathematics where their rapid progress results in a consistently high proportion of pupils exceeding age-related expectations. Your teachers are working hard to ensure that able writers are supported and challenged to compose with flair and confidence. A Year 5 pupil, writing about Annie Edson Taylor's descent of the Niagara Falls in a barrel, showed impressive control of language: 'They watched. They waited. The liquid avalanche came thundering down, roaring, racing, shouting in rage. All eyes were fixed on the small, tubed barrel. No one flinched.'
- Your leaders and teachers have approached 'life without levels' in a sensible and pragmatic way. Their expectations of what pupils should achieve are ambitious and clear. You work collaboratively with other schools to share examples of pupils' writing and ensure that colleagues have a consistent view of standards.
- The school's scrutiny of pupils' work books has focused on teachers' consistent application of school policies. You recognise the need to move this monitoring on to a more precise analysis of what is working well in terms of the teaching of writing and what misconceptions still need to be addressed.
- Evidence in exercise books indicates that there are plentiful opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills in different contexts. Year 2 pupils, for example, have written interesting accounts about the Kalahari Desert based on their reading of *Meerkat mail*. In science, pupils make sensible predictions and write their hypotheses with increasing accuracy. Pupils' basic skills are being developed securely. Frequently, teachers provide helpful feedback to pupils on which they act to improve their work.
- The proportion of pupils who achieved a good level of development at the end of Reception improved strongly in 2015 having been below the national figure in the previous two years. This improvement is being sustained through good-quality teaching and a clear focus on developing children's speaking and early literacy skills. You involved the local authority in auditing early years provision and making improvements. Good liaison with local early years providers is helping you to ensure that children make strong progress from their starting points.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and are highly committed to the school. They told me that they particularly value the exciting experiences that you provide for them. Year 2 pupils had been inspired by their trip to Liverpool Museum and were keen to compare their thoughts about the most impressive exhibits. Other pupils were looking forward to sharing their favourite authors and characters on World Book Day. Your involvement in a

national project to develop an area to encourage pollinating insects is an example of your outward-looking approach to developing an engaging and memorable curriculum.

- Pupils told me that their behaviour is typically very good and that 'everyone looks out for each other'. Pupils who join the school mid-term are made to feel very welcome. Pupils are adamant that the school is free from bullying; they attribute this to good relationships and have absolute certainty that staff would immediately take action if anyone had been the subject of hurtful comments.
- Virtually no pupils are persistently absent from school. You have taken a firm line on the absolute importance of good attendance, which parents appreciate and subscribe to. Where any pupils are identified as vulnerable, you and your staff are particularly vigilant and take prompt action to support them and their families. Attendance is rising.
- Your work with parents and families was highly commended at your last inspection and continues to be a significant strength. Virtually all parents who responded to Ofsted's survey would recommend the school to others. In addition to your teaching staff, your family support worker provides excellent support to your extended school community. Parents especially welcome your accessibility and openness. You make it your priority to greet parents in the morning and ensure that any individual concerns that they have are swiftly addressed.
- Your governors offer you effective support and challenge. Governors are rightly proud of the school, understand the profile of pupils' achievements and take appropriate action, as one governor put it, 'to make sure our pupils get the very best, which is what they thoroughly deserve'. Governors undertake visits to classrooms to see first-hand the work of the school. A governor regularly meets with the school council and listens to pupils' viewpoints, which have been instrumental in, for instance, changing lunchtime menus to increase the uptake of school meals. Governors have thought carefully about the potential benefits of expanding the school, and are resolute in their determination to make sure that increased numbers on roll will not lead to any dilution of the school's ethos.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the impact of the school's initiative to improve pupils' writing is clearly evaluated in terms of the skills that pupils develop and can apply in different situations.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Cheshire West and Chester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- I met with you, your deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, and the leaders for phonics and English to discuss the impact of actions you are taking to raise standards in the school.
- You accompanied me on visits to most classes, where we observed the teaching of English and mathematics and looked at the work in some pupils' books. We also spoke with pupils about their learning.
- I met with four governors including the vice chair of the governing body and had a telephone discussion with a representative from the local authority who has visited the school to monitor its progress.
- I spoke with pupils informally at social times and reviewed the responses made by 82 pupils to the online questionnaire.
- I spoke with several parents and grandparents informally and considered 93 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.
- I reviewed 29 responses made by staff to an online survey.
- I considered your school website, your self-evaluation document, your school improvement plan, your most recent report to the governing body, and information about the achievement of pupils in school. I also reviewed some pupils' exercise books from different year groups.
- I considered the school's safeguarding arrangements, including the checks made on adults working in the school.