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Mrs K Lawson
Principal
Costessey Junior School
Three Mile Lane
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Dear Mrs Lawson

Short inspection of Costessey Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 7 June 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 the predecessor school was judged to be good in July 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. There have been many significant changes since the 2012 inspection including your appointment and new members of staff, as well as the conversion from a maintained school to an academy. In general, the changes have gone smoothly and pupils continue to do well. They make good progress in their time in the junior school, often attaining standards above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. Parents have typically been happy with the provision for their children but lately, with further changes for September 2016, some parents are discontented and understandably concerned.

Pupils are polite, enjoy lessons, play well together and take care of one another. Lessons and playtimes proceed in a relaxed and purposeful manner. Staff expect pupils to think for themselves and to help themselves or others whenever they can. There is a lot of discussion between staff and pupils about what is being learned and how to do even better. Classrooms are well resourced and give pupils bright and well-organised spaces for learning.

Action plans, lesson plans and assessments of pupils' work focus particularly well on the potential disadvantage for different groups of pupils. Leaders have high expectations that pupils of all abilities and all backgrounds do equally well and they keep a close eye on how well pupils perform.

Over the past few years, the performance of different groups of pupils has fluctuated between good progress and expected progress. Sometimes pupils do better in literacy than numeracy and at other times the reverse is true. You have accurately identified that this relates to some inconsistencies in how well teaching challenges pupils to do their very best.

The local governing body is making changes to the way that it conducts its business. Governors know they have not always looked deeply enough at pupils' performance. The governing body has come a long way in challenging senior leaders more thoroughly but there is still more to do to make sure that governors ask the right questions. For example, governors know about the number of pupils making expected progress but not about those who do better than that.

There were no surprises about the things that I identified for further improvement during this inspection. Leaders know what needs to be done and the action plan shows clearly how the weaker elements of the school's work are being addressed.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team makes sure that arrangements to safeguard children are fit for purpose. Staff are well trained to protect pupils and are clear about the actions to take whenever they are concerned. Two things stand out in the school's work to promote pupils' welfare. First, the pastoral team picks up worries and concerns quickly. Records are detailed and of high quality. The team's work is highly valued by parents, pupils and staff. Second, pupils know that it is safe to talk about things that worry them, including if they are worried about how their friends are feeling. They know that staff listen and follow up their concerns.

Minor administrative errors on the school's single central record of employment checks were quickly corrected during this inspection. All staff have the required checks for their suitability to work with children.

Inspection findings

- About a quarter of parents who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire during this inspection have concerns about the school's work. This is unusual, and is at odds with the school's recent questionnaire and parents' response after consultation meetings. Parents are usually positive, particularly about the support for pupils' well-being. Recent information relating to the amalgamation of the infant and junior schools, and Year 2 pupils transferring to the junior school site have caused concerns about communication between home and school. Also, some parents say that they hear about arrangements, such as for school trips, at the last minute.
- The senior leadership team has successfully made significant changes to the curriculum and assessment since September 2015. Staff like the changes, and plan lessons differently and more effectively. As a result,

pupils have a good understanding about how to use their skills across different subjects and know what to learn or do next. For example, the most able pupils work at levels that challenge their skills and understanding from the start of each topic. The curriculum is lively and includes regular trips and visitors.

- Assessments for reading, writing and mathematics are thorough, well understood and used well by leaders and teachers to pick up any dips in pupils' performance. The information is used well to plan how to remedy any concerns. Assessments of pupils' achievements in subjects other than literacy and numeracy are not well developed.
- The leadership of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and disability has improved over recent years and is now good. The special educational needs coordinator makes sure that pupils do well by checking rigorously that teaching supports pupils appropriately. Pupils typically achieve well, particularly in Years 3 and 4 this year. Staff are very appreciative of the coordinator's support and guidance.
- The needs and achievements of pupils known to be entitled to the pupil premium are checked carefully. You have identified that, although they generally achieve well, their achievements are not consistently as high as others'. Nevertheless, the pastoral work to develop the pupils' social skills successfully improves their confidence and attendance.
- Pupils are confident readers and writers. Their reading skills have improved this year as a result of changes to the curriculum. The leader of reading has done a good job in highlighting the importance of reading. Pupils who were previously reluctant to read, particularly the older pupils and the boys, now enjoy reading and use their skills not only for reading but also to improve their spelling and writing. Pupils are encouraged to share and purchase favourite books. For example, pupils in Year 6 chose books in the new Year 6 library, which has had a positive effect on how often they read and the range of books they choose.
- Pupils' writing skills were identified for improvement at the previous inspection. The school's work to improve writing alongside reading has been effective, particularly in Years 3 and 4, by systematically building on the skills that pupils bring from their time in the infant school.
- Pupils behave well and act responsibly as learners. Their responsibility to keep the field free of litter is not so well developed. Pupils say that litter is left for others to pick up.
- Responsibilities for governance are clearly defined and well understood between the local governing body and the trust. Suitable changes were made recently in response to the changing nature of the trust's work. The directors meet frequently to discuss and challenge the work of the school.
- The school meets the requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- parents are well informed and confident about the school's work
- governors have a deep understanding of how well pupils are doing across a range of subjects
- teaching and assessment focus on pupils making more than expected progress.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing body, the chief executive officer of the Evolution Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Heather Yaxley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, the two assistant headteachers, the assessment leader, the pastoral leader (who is also the designated safeguarding lead), the special educational needs coordinator, the secretary, 15 staff, the chief executive officer of the Evolution Academy Trust with one of the directors, and the chair of the governing body with two governors. I looked at pupils' work, listened to them read and talked to them during lessons and playtimes.

I scrutinised documents regarding pupils' performance, the quality of teaching and assessment, and the school's arrangements for safeguarding children. Twenty-one staff and 56 pupils responded to Ofsted's questionnaire. Thirty-four parents responded to Parent View during the inspection (there are 342 pupils on roll). There were 15 written comments from parents, three from staff and 10 from pupils.

This inspection took place on the second day of the principal's return following a period of planned absence. Two assistant headteachers led the school during the principal's absence.

This inspection took place at the same time as an inspection of the infant school, which shares the same leadership team and local governing body. A separate inspection report is available for the infant school and can be found on Ofsted's website.