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Mr Christopher Aitken
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Aitken

Short inspection of Cantley Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 13 July 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 school was judged to be good in June 2011.

This school continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection, there have been several changes in the school's leadership. You took up your position as permanent headteacher in March 2016. In addition, the school has entered into a hard federation with another small school. The two schools now share you as headteacher and have a single governing body. These changes have helped the school to continue to develop and have ensured that Cantley Primary School is a vibrant and outward-looking small school.

You and your governors have embraced the federation with your partner school, identifying the benefits for both schools in terms of shared staffing and opportunities for staff to develop wider expertise. The governing body used the opportunity of reforming as a single governing body to review how it operates. Governors identified that in the past they had not played a sufficiently strategic role and have ensured that this has been rectified. They now provide strong support for you and your team, asking pertinent and challenging questions, clearly focusing on ensuring that pupils in both schools benefit from high-quality education.

You and your governors are highly ambitious for the school. Together, you are open and honest in your evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. You welcome feedback and advice from a variety of sources. For example, you have worked with local authority advisers and brought in an independent consultant to provide additional advice. You are seeking out other schools with high-quality practice so that you can learn from them as you continue to improve the school and to achieve outstanding standards.

Since taking on the headship, you have brought energy and dynamic leadership to the role. You have reorganised the leadership team, strengthened it and created a cohesive group that works across both schools. These leaders share your determination to continue to raise standards even further. They are using their expertise to support others and share best practice, which is improving the quality of teaching further.

Alongside this ambition and focus on improvement, the school has maintained a very strong 'family feel', which is highly valued by parents and pupils alike. A number of parents spoken to during the inspection commented on the warm and welcoming ethos of the school, and of your own approachability. The vast majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire were highly positive about the school. Those parents who spoke to me or who wrote specifically to me during the inspection were glowing in their praise of you, your teachers and non-teaching staff. One parent commented that staff 'cannot do enough for the children and for us as parents'. Another commented on the 'exceptional staff'. You and your team continue to look for ways to further improve parental involvement with their child's learning. For example, during the inspection, parents and grandparents were invited in to try the recent Year 6 national standardised tests so that they understood the challenge pupils face. You have regular curriculum events where parents come in to learn about different aspects of the curriculum, such as phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) and mathematics. Parents also know that they are welcome to have lunch with their child whenever they are able to, simply booking their lunch in the morning. You have set up a secure online community page for parents so that you can provide information and receive feedback easily with parents, including those who are not always able to come to the school regularly. As a result, parents said that the school is a very welcoming place and that communication is very good.

Pupils also speak highly of the school. Pupils spoken to during the inspection told me that the school is a friendly place where 'teachers make learning fun'. They said that teachers and teaching assistants help them, explaining things well when they find it difficult, and challenging them when they need to move on. One pupil said, 'the school is always well prepared for everything, and so we are too'. They commented that they know all staff and are known by all staff very well, and feel happy and safe in school.

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that rigorous checks on staff are carried out and recorded and that all statutory requirements are met in respect of keeping children safe. Your governor with responsibility for safeguarding visits regularly to check that all records are kept up to date. You and your staff carefully document any concerns about a pupil, and take robust action where necessary, following up with other agencies such as social services when this is needed. Staff training is kept up to date so that everyone at the school is very aware of what to do to keep children safe.

Inspection findings

- Standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6 have remained above national averages since the previous inspection because teaching in these core subjects is good. You carefully track the progress of each pupil and quickly identify if any pupil is falling behind. You discuss with your team what support is needed and put this in place, checking its impact.
- You identified that standards at the end of Year 2 were not as high as they should be and implemented a new programme for improving pupils' reading and writing. This has been effective and has brought about improvements in the number of pupils who achieved the expected standard both in the Year 1 phonics assessment and by the end of Year 2.
- While progress is good for all pupils, girls make more rapid progress than boys do, particularly in writing. As a result, over time fewer boys achieve above the expected standard by the time they leave the school. You have begun to address this. Starting with Reception, you have been successful in improving the proportion of boys who achieve a good level of development because you have ensured that reading and writing tasks are embedded across the curriculum. For example, during the inspection, children picked the carrots they had grown and were using these as starting points for writing, labelling and describing the carrots. You have also sought to make reading more attractive to boys so that they read more widely and use this to improve their writing. You have regular 'relaxed reading' sessions, where pupils are encouraged to enjoy a favourite or new book, and have built a new and attractive reading area for Year 5 and 6 pupils where they say they go to enjoy reading or to work in a peaceful environment. However, you acknowledge that more needs to be done to ensure that boys make as rapid progress in their writing as girls.
- You and your staff have successfully addressed issues from the previous inspection report. You have ensured that pupils have a better understanding of what they should achieve in lessons and how to improve their work. Teachers set out clearly what each pupil should achieve and pupils check their work to ensure that they have included the elements identified. The school has developed some creative approaches to this. For example, in one class, pupils take part in 'The lost pens of Caligra', a task that involves pupils in checking they have included features of writing including punctuation and grammar. Each time they demonstrate the features listed, they acquire points that help them in their 'quest'. Pupils are highly motivated by this, saying that it helps them remember and include the features and so their writing is better.
- The school provides opportunities as they arise for pupils to develop their cultural understanding, for example using a teacher's links with Japan and with America to set up correspondence between pupils here and abroad. You take pupils on trips, most recently to London, to experience greater diversity. You have plans in place for a specific project to forge more links with schools across the United Kingdom. Examples of good practice in developing cultural understanding within the curriculum are evident, such as the work done by Years 5 and 6 studying Martin Luther King, and extending this to work around racism and other forms of discrimination. However, a

planned approach to cultural development within the curriculum is not in place in all classes.

- The school provides a broad curriculum where pupils enjoy studying, for example, the local area and identifying why settlements are as they are. They learn about periods of history such as the Bronze Age and about people from the past, such as the Aztecs. Subjects are taught through a topic-based approach, enabling links to be well made between different subjects. However, teachers' expectations of pupils in foundation subjects are sometimes not as high as they are in reading, writing and mathematics. For example, during the inspection, pupils in Years 1 and 2 were learning about the life cycle of a frog but the task lacked challenge for some pupils, who found it very easy and so did not make progress in their learning. You recognise that you do not yet track the achievement of pupils in these subjects closely enough to ensure that pupils progress at a similar rate as in reading, writing and mathematics.
- By making lessons fun and establishing very good communication with parents, you have been successful in improving attendance, which is now above the national average. Where you identify that a pupil's attendance is too low, you meet with parents to discuss reasons and to identify how the school can help. You remind parents about the impact that absence has on pupils' achievement in very clear terms so that they know why the school attaches such importance to good attendance. You identified that the attendance of some disadvantaged pupils was lower than that of others. Following discussions with your team and with pupils' parents, you have put in place additional support paid for by the funding provided for disadvantaged pupils. This is having a positive impact on improving the attendance of this small number of pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- further develop the curriculum by:
 - ensuring that the progress of pupils in all subjects is tracked carefully and is as rapid as in reading, writing and mathematics
 - planning systematically for pupils' cultural development within the curriculum in each class
- ensure that boys make more rapid progress in writing so that the proportion achieving above the expected standard in Year 6 increases.

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

Yours sincerely

Maria Curry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and one senior teacher. I met with two governors and with a small number of pupils from Years 4, 5 and 6. I scrutinised a range of school documents, including information on pupils' progress, safeguarding, school development planning and the school's self-evaluation. I visited all classes and evaluated pupils' work. I evaluated the school's website and found it to meet requirements on the publication of specified information.