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Debra Cannings and Hazel Farlam
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Dear Mrs Cannings and Mrs Farlam

Short inspection of Linslade Lower School

Following my visit to the school on 15 September 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 May 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Together, as joint headteachers, you provide the school with strong and effective leadership. It was a pleasure to see the close partnership and harmony that exists between you. You equally hold infinite knowledge about all members of the school community that you draw on effectively to ensure that pupils of all ages and abilities get a good deal. Pupils' individual needs and abilities are catered for well so that they all make good progress from their starting points, especially in reading and writing. You also identify accurately where there is more work to do, for example in mathematics, to raise achievement so that it is as good as it is in other subjects. Results from the pupil, staff and parent questionnaires show overwhelmingly favourable responses and a high level of satisfaction. In the Parent View survey (Ofsted's online questionnaire), 94% said that they would recommend the school to another parent. One parent's comments reflect the vast majority of the rest: 'All of my children have thrived at Linslade. Most importantly, they have developed their social skills, friendships, self-confidence and sense of worth in the community through the values they have learned at the school. To me that is every bit as important as the brilliant academic education they have received. They have been challenged and stretched by their teachers, and, as a result, have achieved more than they ever thought possible.'

The equal emphasis that the school places on pupils' academic achievement and their personal development is one of the reasons why this is a good school. Pupils

of all abilities receive good teaching on a daily basis. This includes pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils, including the most able who are also disadvantaged. Pupils looked after by the local authority are supported sensitively so that they quickly settle in and make progress. The pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils is used effectively to help them to catch up, to accelerate the progress of the most able disadvantaged pupils and to ensure that they have full access to activities that non-disadvantaged pupils have access to. The strong relationships existing between pupils, parents and staff help all pupils to feel safe and confident. Linslade pupils are looked after very well. Staff know every pupil as an individual and they all go the extra mile to ensure that their particular needs are met. This helps pupils to learn well and boosts their confidence.

The early years team provides an extensive range of exciting and challenging activities to move children forward in all areas of learning and get them off to a positive start. Outdoor learning is particularly inviting. Adults support the children well, skilfully knowing when to show them how to do something as well as when to step back and let them find out for themselves. Only a few days into the new school year, we saw children in the Nursery and Reception classes completely absorbed and happy in learning through purposeful play. In key stages 1 and 2 pupils have also made a positive start. Their new teachers have a clear understanding of what they already know, understand and can do because the school has effective systems for gathering and checking this information so that it is accurate. Arrangements for transition from one class to the next ensure that information about pupils' learning, social, emotional and medical needs is passed on from one teacher to the next, well in advance of each school year.

Reading is taught very well. Children in the early years learn about letters and the sounds they make (phonics). Phonics is taught systematically throughout the school so that by the end of Year 2 all pupils have a good understanding of how to break words down into smaller sounds to read them or to blend sounds together to spell them. Teachers are astute in introducing pupils to new and sophisticated vocabulary so that they can use it in their writing. We saw this in practice during the inspection. For example, Year 1 pupils learned what the word 'ultimatum' means, which cropped up in a story they were listening to. I heard eight of the most able key stage 2 pupils read. They were all fluent, expressive readers who enjoy reading books at home and at school. They discussed their individual reading interests and preferences maturely. Over time, pupils achieve well in reading, which bodes well for their future learning in all subjects. From their reading, they have a good repertoire of vocabulary and understanding of grammar to draw on in their writing.

Leaders and governors are conscious that, over time, pupils' achievement in mathematics lags behind reading and writing. They are on the case to rectify this. A new approach has been introduced this year to address identified weaknesses and improve pupils' understanding of number so that they are able to apply it in solving problems. This is work in progress and it is too early to see if the changes are making a difference. While the subject is a priority for improvement that staff and governors know about, you do not convey this message well enough so that parents

and pupils know more about your plans. Your planning is thorough and you have set regular intervals throughout the year when you and the governors will consider if your plans are leading to pupils' better achievement in mathematics. This is good practice. Systems for monitoring the school's work are effective and self-evaluation is accurate. Several of your subject leaders are relatively new to the role. They have secure knowledge in their subjects to draw upon and make a contribution to improvements. Their skills in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning, especially in observing teaching at first hand, are underdeveloped.

Pupils do well in most subjects. A parent commented that 'topics are always varied and interesting', and another said how much their children have enjoyed experience days and extra-curricular activities. Leo club is a Saturday football club run by parent volunteers that is very well attended. Pupils do well in sports generally because the sport premium grant is used effectively to increase their participation rates and to provide them with access to competitive events. Equally, outcomes in art and design are impressive. Pupils explore a wide range of media to develop their creativity. In particular, they learn how to capture ideas and observations in their sketchbooks, including drawing which notably develops well from an early age.

You have addressed areas for development from the previous inspection successfully. Pupils now have frequent access to computing and other technologies to support their learning. Handwriting and spelling have improved and pupils of all ages show confidence in their learning because they are encouraged to do as much as possible for themselves without the help of adults.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors promote a strong culture of shared responsibility for safeguarding. Parents unanimously agreed in Parent View that their children are safe at school. One commented that 'you can see and feel that there is a lot of attention paid to safeguarding procedures'. Pupils are taught how to be safe online and the personal, social, health and economic education programme teaches them to be aware of issues such as bullying and what to do if they feel worried or anxious. Good relationships between pupils and staff help them to have confidence to talk about any concerns.

The early years team who are responsible for the youngest children promote the importance of safeguarding to parents from the moment their children start school. All staff in the school demonstrate high standards of care and high regard for safety and safeguarding. They are quick to spot potential safeguarding issues and are confident in referring any concerns to you as lead professionals for safeguarding. In turn you make referrals to external agencies to seek early help for the most vulnerable families. You are both vigilant about pupils' attendance and take immediate action when regular attendance slips. The good relationships you develop with parents give them confidence to share any problems they may have at home and seek help if they need it. This open dialogue helps you to make the right decisions about ways forward to support any pupils at risk and their parents. Teaching and non-teaching staff are regularly trained in safeguarding and the

'Prevent' duty so that they are in a strong position to identify potentially vulnerable pupils. Leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. Statutory checks made on all staff, governors, regular volunteers and contractors are thorough to ensure their suitability to work with children. An external audit of safeguarding arrangements has been undertaken and governors have ensured that all recommendations have been addressed.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and governors are well informed about the school's strengths and weaknesses and they are ambitious for the school to improve continuously. Priorities for improvement are based on accurate information and evidence of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Examination of the school's evaluation shows a wide range of appropriate evidence to justify that the school provides good-quality education and care for its pupils. Information on pupils' progress and attainment is evaluated well and used to inform future plans as well as to determine when pupils are falling behind and need extra help to catch up. School improvement planning is fit for purpose, with clearly stated actions and tight timescales for the completion of tasks. It is clear who is leading each action, when progress checks will be made and how this will be done.
- Governors visit regularly and have a high profile in the school. They fulfil all of their statutory duties. They meet with parents and seek their views. Then they write a newsletter and answer parents' questions, saying what they plan to do next to show that parents' views have been taken on board. Almost all parents are very strong supporters of the school, as seen in the responses to Parent View and the free text comments that parents made online.
- Pupils make good progress from their starting points. Reading is a strength, as seen in the phonics screening check results in key stage 1 and the Year 2 national tests. Pupils in key stage 2 are confident and capable readers who show pleasure in talking about books. Literacy is taught well throughout the school.
- Pupils' achievement in mathematics is not as strong. Staff have received additional good-quality training to help them teach aspects that are different in the curriculum. A new scheme for mathematics has been purchased to cover the content of the national curriculum systematically and to promote pupils' fluency, including their understanding of concepts, reasoning and problem-solving skills. Arrangements are planned to monitor the success of the new scheme. While the lead teacher for mathematics is involved in checking that pupils are learning all that they should, planned opportunities for observing teaching and learning at first hand are not regular enough.
- The work seen in a sample of last year's Year 4 pupils' books shows that they made good progress in most subjects. The sample included pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, the most able pupils and disadvantaged pupils including disadvantaged pupils who were most able. Pupils in Year 4 are prepared well for the transition to middle school both academically and socially.

- Children looked after do well. Strategies are in place to support them sensitively and well from the moment they join the school. One of you is responsible for supervising their academic progress and well-being and for liaising with foster parents and the relevant local authority's virtual headteacher. This ensures that their personal education plans are implemented and that their academic progress is measured so that they do not fall behind.
- Teaching is at least good in all classes and teachers have high expectations for their pupils. We visited every class in the early years and key stages 1 and 2 to observe teaching and learning for a short time. Assessment of pupils' learning is accurate and informative. Information passes freely from one teacher to the next so that when pupils move classes, the work for them is planned from their starting points to move their knowledge and understanding forward quickly. You ensure the accuracy of assessment by using external professionals to double-check your judgements. Assessment practice has improved since the previous inspection, when work was not always as well matched to pupils' learning needs.
- Since the previous inspection, when pupils had limited access to technology, the school's infrastructure for computing has been upgraded. All pupils learn computing skills systematically from an early age and have access to a wider range of digital technologies, such as tablets, to increase their competency and confidence.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the proportion of pupils working at or beyond the expected standard in mathematics by the end of Year 2 increases
- the school's chosen approaches to the teaching of mathematics are refined and embedded to develop pupils' understanding, reasoning and problem solving
- mathematics as a subject has a high profile in school
- subject leaders develop their skills especially in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and 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 Central Bedfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Linda Killman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During the inspection I met with you, two governors, a group of Year 3 and 4 pupils, the early years team and subject leaders for English, mathematics and computing. I spoke to the school's improvement partner on the telephone.
- I looked at a wide range of documentation and policies, including the school's self-evaluation, plans for improvement and relevant safeguarding information. I also checked the single central record that holds information about the statutory checks that are made on staff to ensure their suitability to work with children.
- I saw teaching and learning at first hand in all classes, looked at a sample of pupils' work in their English, mathematics and topic books and work on display in corridors. I talked to eight of the most able readers in Years 3 and 4 and heard them read.
- The key lines of enquiry I chose to test on the short inspection day included: pupils' achievement across a range of subjects, especially disadvantaged pupils, the most able pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities; how well the school checks pupils' learning; parents' views of the school; the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements; and pupils' access to and use of information and communication technology.