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Mrs Heather Haigh
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Dear Mrs Haigh

Short inspection of Cholsey Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 4 October 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 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. However, between 2013 and 2015, while in some areas your results stayed strong, in some, they dipped. For example, between 2013 and 2015, there was a decline in the combined progress that pupils made in their key stage 2 tests and assessments. In order to secure improvement, you have wisely made considerable changes, including the appointment of new leaders. You have rightly placed great emphasis on driving up academic achievement and continue to do so. At the same time, you have maintained those aspects of the school that your pupils and parents cherish. Your new leaders have implemented fresh approaches to teaching. This has led to improvements in pupils' achievement. Early information from test results indicates that in 2016, pupils' outcomes were strong in most areas, including for children in the early years. Although the percentage of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics check improved, it was still below the national average. A high percentage of those who did not achieve the expected standard were pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You have responded to this robustly and now have a dedicated phonics leader who has recently made some positive changes. You rightly acknowledge that there is still more to do in this area.

You have placed creativity and self-expression at the forefront of your work. You provide rich opportunities for pupils to hone and develop their artistic skills by learning to play musical instruments, performing in plays and responding to the

famous works of art hanging outside every classroom. The most able are particularly well served by these opportunities and are able to articulate the difference these make to their overall experience of education. Through these experiences, you have enhanced pupils' sense of awe and wonder, as well as their resilience, self-confidence and curiosity. You have also broadened pupils' cultural horizons, which was an area for improvement from the previous inspection.

Your school is a beacon of learning within the community. You have championed the transformative power of education with pupils and parents alike. A good example of this is your support for local community adult literacy programmes. Parents highly value the distinctive education you provide. Additional comments made by parents using the free-text facility in Parent View were overwhelmingly positive. Statements such as, 'the school delivers on its mission statement to enable each child to reach its potential through academic excellence and individual care' were not untypical. The overwhelming praise parents have for you and your staff is a testament to the way that you intellectually, artistically, culturally and emotionally nurture the children in your care. It was with these guiding principles in mind that you fully embraced the increased challenge of the 2014 national curriculum. You have strengthened teaching in science and humanities, and further developed the way you teach mathematics and literacy.

New subject leaders, appointed over the last two years in mathematics and literacy, have made a significant contribution to moving the school forward. They have genuine passion and expertise in the subjects they lead. Their additional roles as pupil progress champions give them useful insights into how well agreed approaches are working. The training and support they provide for teachers are highly effective. As a result, new approaches to teaching mathematics and literacy are consistently and successfully implemented. However, on occasion, teaching assistants are not used effectively enough during whole-class teaching sessions.

There have also been many effective changes to teaching in Reception and Year 1. These paid dividends in 2016, when the percentage of pupils reaching a good level of development increased to 73%, which is above the national average. Year 1 phonics results have also improved but remained below average. Since September, your leaders have wisely made further changes to the way phonics is taught. This includes ensuring that children and pupils have an additional session of phonics each day. You are currently checking the impact of these changes.

Of note is how much your school has benefited from the support and challenge provided by other schools in the umbrella trust. The trust operates as a partnership of equals, so your school's governors have autonomy over the decisions they make. However, headteacher colleagues carry out rigorous monitoring visits on a regular basis. Following each visit, they have helpfully identified key improvement areas.

Governors have made good use of these to hold the school to account. They also benefit from working alongside other governors from good and outstanding schools in the umbrella trust. Although the numbers of pupils eligible for additional funding are small, governors have rightly focused on how best to ensure that this group achieves well. They have challenged the school to support them and their families

so that they attend school regularly. Following some disappointing results in 2015, governors sensibly sought support and training from the local authority which strengthened the way that they have 'helped the school to do its best'.

You have successfully tackled the areas for improvement from the inspection of your predecessor school. Notably, you have improved teaching and ensured that your checks on teaching sharply focus on the progress pupils are making. You have provided strong evidence that the upward trend in pupils' outcomes is set to continue.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff are well trained in safeguarding, using local authority training materials along with specially selected additional materials, such as those produced by charities. Where appropriate, these materials have been successfully used with pupils to raise awareness, for example, in assemblies about being bullied and groomed online. Pupils told me that they felt safe in school and knew how to protect themselves when online.

You have rightly concentrated on providing early interventions and support for pupils and their families. Your family support worker has built strong and effective relationships with a number of parents. Where necessary, she has provided practical help that has enabled parents to provide better care for their children. Over the past year, the family support worker has successfully worked with targeted families to improve attendance, and as a result, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved.

Inspection findings

- Governors, and partner headteachers from the trust, know the school well. In recent years, they have rightly requested that the school improve its outcomes for pupils. They have astutely noted that given how excellently pupils behave, teachers should have higher expectations of them. Leaders and teachers have, subsequently, raised their expectations of what pupils can achieve and how hard they should work. Expectations are now high.
- The way mathematics is taught is highly effective. Pupils are given the opportunity to explore topics in real depth and are required to apply their skills in thought-provoking problems. They make good use of mathematical equipment in order to do this.
- On occasion, in some lessons, teaching assistants are not clear enough about their role. They therefore sometimes miss opportunities to support pupils.
- As part of improved practice in mathematics and literacy, pupils are provided with a journal. Pupils use this effectively to record how they have used equipment to solve problems and prove hypotheses, making good use of mathematical language to do so. In literacy, they use it to justify their opinions and hone their ideas. This journal supports the progress of all pupils. Most-able pupils are using it particularly well.

- Improved approaches to teaching writing have enabled pupils to write confidently about topics and situations that are complex and beyond their experience. Pupils wrote vivid descriptions of the Great Fire of London, using an appropriately formal register and interesting vocabulary.
- Pupils access a range of subjects, such as science and modern foreign languages, that prepare them well for the challenges of secondary school. In science, they develop the ability to think like scientists by designing experiments and then justifying their designs. For instance, pupils correctly used key words such as 'variable' when explaining their experiments.
- Your focus on developing pupils' creative abilities has provided rich opportunities to extend pupils' appreciation of the artistic and musical traditions of different cultures. You have made good use of the large canvases of famous art works that hang outside each classroom to develop pupils' vocabulary so they can confidently appreciate, critique and evaluate art.
- Pupils' confidence is further enhanced by providing them with roles that enable them to play a greater part in their own and other's learning. You have ensured that disadvantaged pupils occupy many of these roles. As a result, pupils feel that they have a stake in their own learning.
- Phonics teaching has improved and good use is made of the little books that your key stage 1 leader has produced that allow pupils to practise sounding out the letters they have learned. However, you rightly acknowledge that there is more work to be done in phonics. For example, in some phonics sessions, a number of pupils and children did not secure the key skills that the teacher had planned for them to learn. In some cases, this was because teachers did not ensure that pupils gave their full attention to learning the sounds that match the chosen letters. In others, it was because not enough focus was placed on mastering the key skill. Your new phonics lead has strong plans in place to improve phonics further.
- Your subject leaders and pupil progress champions carefully monitor the impact of new approaches on pupils' learning, focusing on the progress of most-able pupils and those eligible for additional funding. Consequently, your own progress data shows that, in 2016, most-able pupils and those eligible for pupil premium funding made strong progress. Most met their challenging targets, including in key stage 1.
- According to 2016 early test results, the percentage of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was above average, despite the increased challenge of the key stage 2 national tests. As a result of changes to the way you teach guided reading, the percentage of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading was significantly above average.
- Better teaching has led to improved achievements in key stage 1. Pupils achieved broadly in line with the national average in 2016 in mathematics and reading, and slightly above in writing. The school's strong focus on developing higher level reading skills meant that the percentage of pupils achieving greater depth in the key stage 1 reading assessment was well above average.

- Early test results show that the most able achieved well in the 2016 key stage 2 national tests. The percentage of pupils assessed as working at greater depth in writing was above average, and similarly a greater than average percentage of pupils achieved the higher standard in mathematics and in reading.
- Your early years leaders have made significant changes to the setting. These have helped children learn more effectively. Of note are changes made to child-initiated play activities, so resources better enable children to learn key numeracy and literacy skills through play.
- The number of pupils eligible for additional funding is well below average and in some year groups and phases, such as the current Year 1, it is below five. The very small number means that it is more appropriate for leaders to analyse each pupil's individual progress than that of groups. The school's leaders have successfully developed the way they do this, so more focus is placed on the impact of initiatives. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils in the school made increasingly strong progress from Year 3 to Year 6. They therefore went on to attain better than their peers in reading and writing, and in line with them in mathematics, according to early test results from 2016.
- Throughout the inspection, pupils' behaviour was impeccable. They were respectful of their teachers and each other and totally enthused by their learning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- further improvements planned for phonics are effectively implemented and their impact is rigorously monitored
- teaching assistants are used more effectively during whole-class teaching sessions so they provide better support for targeted pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The lead inspector, along with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, agreed the key areas during an initial meeting. These included improvements in phonics and the early years, investigating whether new approaches to teaching mathematics and writing have led to improved outcomes, the impact of phase leaders and subject leaders, and the breadth and depth of the curriculum. One key line of enquiry was also focused on how well the school ensures that disadvantaged pupils and the

most able make the progress of which they are capable. Another important focus related to the impact of the governing body and how well headteachers from partner schools in the umbrella trust hold you to account.

I met with subject and year-group leaders twice. On the first occasion, the meeting focused on the impact of their work on developing teaching. On the second occasion, they used pupils' books to illustrate the impact of their improvements and also shared information on pupils' progress. I also met with the chair of the governing body, accompanied by two other governors, and met separately with the family support worker, along with the headteacher, to discuss safeguarding and attendance. The headteachers from the other schools in the umbrella trust also held a meeting with me. I listened to a group of pupils read and talked with them about their school. Short visits were made to a number of lessons, including in phonics, accompanied by a member of the senior leadership team, to observe teaching and look at work in pupils' books. I observed pupils' behaviour in a range of situations, including in lessons and around school. The 64 responses parents made in response to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) and 57 comments made via free text were considered, and a letter written to the lead inspector by a parent. I also considered 24 responses to the staff questionnaire and five replies to the pupil survey. I analysed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the latest improvement plan, information about pupils' progress and safeguarding documentation.