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Mr Brian Storey
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Dear Mr Storey

Short inspection of Church End Lower School

Following my visit to the school on 15 November 2016 with Cindy Impey, Her Majesty's Inspector, 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 April 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school has changed significantly since it was inspected five years ago. It has almost doubled in size and now provides education from pre-school to the end of Year 4 on both of its two sites. You and the governors have managed this rapid expansion extremely well. Equipping a new building, recruiting staff and settling in new pupils in large numbers have not distracted you from maintaining a clear focus on providing good-quality education and care for all pupils. In particular, you and the deputy headteacher are skilful in developing positive relationships with staff, parents and pupils. This is evident in the very high level of satisfaction expressed by the 46 staff who responded to the staff questionnaire and almost all of the 114 parents who responded to Parent View. Parents particularly praise staff for:

- being 'friendly and easy to talk to'
- listening to them and sorting out problems quickly
- 'greeting our children at the gate every day'
- helping children 'to feel safe and secure'
- the good progress that their children make
- their sensitivity in managing medical problems and/or disability
- their 'great teaching'.

Leaders and governors have addressed the areas for improvement reported in the previous inspection successfully. Pupils are now achieving as well in mathematics as they do in reading and writing. This is attributable to effective leadership of the subject, good training for staff and regular checking on the quality of teaching and learning. In addition, governors keep a watchful eye on pupils' achievement. They can accurately interpret a wide range of information about pupils' learning, which previously was not the case.

Governors are now confident to press you to identify the underlying reasons behind any groups who appear not to be achieving as well as others. They are acutely aware that the percentage of children reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception is average and that it has not risen over time. We found that in all Reception classes, provision for children in the prime areas of learning (communication and language, personal, social, emotional and physical development) and to promote their early reading, writing and number skills is good, both indoors and outside. The majority of children reach a good level of development, but too few exceed the early learning goals. We saw examples in Reception on both sites where adults did not challenge the most able children well enough. They only learned as much as the other children, when they were capable of more.

You have been pivotal in ensuring that the school is a unified community. You and the governors are insistent that whichever site pupils attend, they have access to the same rich curriculum and memorable experiences. We saw pupils on both sites enjoying their learning. For example, Year 1 pupils were fascinated and immersed in discovery as they learned how a magnet works. Most pupils make good progress from their starting points, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils of all abilities enjoy reading widely and often. Teachers ensure that the most able pupils read books that are sufficiently challenging. Most pupils reach standards of attainment that are above national averages in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 1. These standards are maintained right through to the end of Year 4 so that pupils are well prepared for transfer to middle school.

Leaders and governors plan for continuous improvement. You are outward-looking and visionary. You are already thinking about the leadership structure and staffing levels required for the next phase of expansion in 2018, when pupil numbers will rise again by at least a third. Your plans for development are sound. Rigorous and accurate monitoring of the school's work enables you to identify strengths and weaknesses, which in turn inform the plan. You are ambitious for all pupils to achieve well. In the plan, for example, you identify the most able pupils as a focus group for improvement. Using the pupil premium, you provide a range of extra support to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. However, as you know through your evaluation of their learning, some of them did not do as well as other pupils last year. While they are included in your improvement plans in terms of all other pupils, they do not feature as a specific target group.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the governing body have created a culture where everyone shares responsibility for safeguarding. The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are effective and records are detailed and of high quality. As designated lead professionals for safeguarding and child protection, you and the deputy headteacher ensure that you train all staff to identify pupils who may be at risk so that they are confident to share their concerns with you. You do not hesitate to refer cases to the multi-agency hub to seek early help assessments if appropriate. Your extensive experience working with the local safeguarding board places you both in a strong position to make those decisions. Staff receive regular updates ensuring that they know when guidance from the Department for Education changes, and you ensure that the safeguarding policy is updated accordingly. Staff are all vetted carefully prior to appointment and all the statutory checks are made to ensure their suitability to work with children. A strong ethos surrounding children's safety and well-being exists within the school community. Documentation, including individual child protection case files, is kept in chronological order so that important information can be retrieved easily. Importantly, you recognise that staff dealing with complex and sensitive child protection issues require supervision and the opportunity to talk about how these affect their personal well-being.

Inspection findings

- Pupils' attainment in mathematics has risen since the previous inspection through stronger leadership. The subject is no longer weaker than reading and writing. Standards of attainment are above average.
- You now have a team of teachers monitoring mathematics under the supervision of the subject leader.
- The subject lead for mathematics has been trained well to lead the subject proficiently. The leader provides effective coaching and development for other staff so that they are well versed in the changes in the 2014 national curriculum. Consequently, they have adjusted their teaching, ensuring that requirements of the new, and more challenging, mathematics curriculum are catered for.
- You have kept a watchful eye on the subject. The mathematics team undertakes an in-depth review of teaching and learning in all classes on a regular basis. You ensure that your assessment information about pupils' learning is double-checked to ensure that it is accurate.
- Parents have been invited to come into school to learn more about how the subject is taught. You have drafted in support from external advisers to support the school in strengthening teaching in mathematics.
- Governors also play their part in monitoring the subject. One governor has responsibility for mathematics and meets regularly with the lead teacher to review teaching and learning.
- Leaders at all levels have contributed to the improvement made in the teaching

of mathematics since the previous inspection. This had led to pupils' good progress and above-average attainment.

- Disadvantaged pupils receive extra help and support to raise their achievement. The pupil premium is used effectively and most disadvantaged pupils make at least expected progress. As well as targeting the pupil premium funding to raise disadvantaged pupils' achievement, you also consider their emotional well-being. This has been particularly effective, for example, in helping pupils in foster care to settle into school well and make progress.
- You track the progress made by disadvantaged pupils as diligently as all other groups. However, the school's improvement plan does not identify them as a priority group. There are some disadvantaged pupils who did not, for example, reach the expected standard for phonics at the end of Year 2, and addressing this is essential for them to be successful in learning across all subjects in the future.
- The most able pupils, including those who are also disadvantaged pupils, do feature in your plan for improvement. The most able children in Reception are identified as 'high fliers' yet the next steps planned for their learning are not ambitious enough. For example, in a phonics session, the most able children were not particularly challenged by the activities. This is why too few of them exceed the early learning goals by the time they move into Year 1.
- While most pupils achieve well in mathematics and English, this is not the case in other subjects in some classes. In some Year 4 classes, the most able pupils' advanced literacy skills in English are not evident in their written work in other subjects.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of Reception rises above the national average
- ambition is stronger for the most able children in the early years to exceed the early learning goals
- in the school's plans for improvement, the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, including those who are also the most able, is expressed explicitly as a priority.

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 inspectors met with you and the deputy headteacher, the chair of the governing body and six other governors, and the subject leader for mathematics. I had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority.
- We looked at a range of information about pupils' achievement, documents and minutes of the governing body meetings, records and policies, including those relating to safeguarding and child protection.
- We considered results from 114 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and those provided by 46 staff in the staff questionnaire. We also spoke informally with parents at the start of the school day.
- Together with either you, the deputy headteacher, the head of school at Forest End or the early years leader, we observed teaching and learning in every class on both sites and looked at a small sample of pupils' written work in a range of subjects. We heard a few pupils from Year 1 and Year 4 read and talked to them about their books.
- The key lines of enquiry that I identified to look at in more depth during this inspection included: how effectively leaders and governors have improved the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics since the previous inspection; the quality of the provision for children in the early years classes; how well the school spends the pupil premium funding to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils; and the effectiveness of governance and safeguarding arrangements.