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23 February 2017

Sue Dury
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Dury

Short inspection of Ickleford Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 31 January 2017, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You agreed that there is still work to do to accelerate progress and further improve pupil outcomes, especially in mathematics and boys' writing. However, it is clear that Ickleford Primary School is an improving school.

You and your staff provide a safe, caring and warm environment which encourages pupils to enjoy their learning. As a result, pupils enjoy school, achieve well, and have very positive attitudes towards learning. All of the pupils I spoke to are proud of their school.

Since the previous inspection you have appointed some new members of staff, including the deputy headteacher, who has been in post for two years. You feel the fresh ideas brought into the school by new staff have supported improvements in the school.

You have responded well to the weaknesses reflected in the national tests and your internal monitoring of pupils' progress. You have correctly identified that boys are making less progress in reading and writing than girls. In order to engage boys in reading, the school has invested in new books on topics that are more interesting to boys. I listened to a group of key stage 1 boys read. Pupils who find reading difficult use a range of strategies to read unfamiliar words. Their confidence as readers is developing well. The most able readers read fluently and are starting to put

expression into their reading. All of the pupils said they enjoyed reading.

There is evidence that some of the strategies you have introduced, such as the weekly writing mornings, are starting to have an impact on improving progress in writing for all year groups of pupils, including boys. Leaders have also looked at the teaching of mathematics in order to improve the engagement and progress of girls. Early indicators suggest this is having a positive impact on girls' progress.

Since the previous inspection, you and the governors have become more adept in judging the impact of leaders' actions on improving teaching, learning, and pupil outcomes. Governors understand the impact of teaching and support strategies on the progress of all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils.

The curriculum is exciting and interesting. Pupils value the trips and visits provided to enrich their learning. They described them as 'awesome', because they are 'fun as well as educational'. Pupils also enjoy the extra-curricular clubs as they cover a range of activities. You have increased the variety of sporting opportunities in the school so all year groups have the chance to participate in a wide range of sports at competition level or for personal enjoyment.

Your school values ensure that pupils show respect and understanding of the differences between members of the school community and society. These values promote pupils' spiritual, moral and social education exceptionally well and ensure they are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Pupils proudly showed me the values display and talked at great length about these values and the recognition they receive when they apply one of these values to support other pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

Procedures for keeping pupils safe are fit for purpose and the records are detailed. All staff are trained annually in the latest guidance, including the 'Prevent' agenda. Staff know what to do if they have any concerns about the safety and well-being of any pupil. I discussed procedures for following up any concerns with you and the chair of governors, and found that your system of referrals follows the latest guidance, and you take advice from the appropriate authorities. Governors regularly review the effectiveness of procedures and the safety of the school site. As a result, security has been increased to ensure that no adult has access to the school without reporting to the school office, where their identity will be checked.

School records, confirmed by the pupils I spoke to, show that bullying is rare. Pupils understand the difference between bullying and falling out. They told me that on occasions they do have disagreements. However, they have every confidence that staff will listen to them, and help them to resolve issues. The curriculum provides the opportunity for pupils to learn about keeping themselves safe. Pupils are knowledgeable about the risks of using the internet and what to do if they have a concern. Pupils told me, 'Teachers don't stop going on about e-safety.'

The website provides helpful advice for parents on internet safety, and you run annual workshops for parents.

Inspection findings

- To establish whether the school remains good, my first line of enquiry was about writing. This was an area for improvement from the last inspection, and test results in 2016 indicated pupils' progress in writing is not as strong as in reading, especially for boys. You agreed, and stated that writing remains a key improvement priority for the school as there is still a sizable proportion of boys who are not yet writing in enough depth to extend their vocabulary and grammar.
- From looking at a range of pupils' books it is clear that the actions you have taken to improve writing are having a positive impact on the quality of writing in all year groups. Pupils write across a range of subjects and many write in depth using the correct spelling, punctuation and grammar. Teachers expect pupils to write neatly and produce the same quality of writing across all subjects. Having discussed the reasons why boys are less enthusiastic about writing, we agreed that the curriculum topics are not always as interesting to boys as they are girls.
- My second line of enquiry looked at whether teaching was sufficiently challenging, especially for the most able pupils. The end of key stage results for the last three years indicate that the proportion of pupils making more than expected progress has often been below average in one or more subjects.
- Our visits to lessons indicated that levels of challenge do vary between subjects and classes. We saw some good examples of challenge in a range of subjects. The work provided made pupils think hard, or enabled them to apply their skills and knowledge to different contexts. Some effective examples were seen in science and humanities books. However, in some classes opportunities to develop mathematical reasoning through problem-solving were limited.
- After looking at the books, we agreed that the good practice seen in the school needs to be shared so that more teachers are setting demanding work and providing more problem-solving activities in mathematics. We also agreed that all groups of pupils, not just the most able, need to be set more demanding work.
- My third line of enquiry was to follow up the area for development from the last inspection relating to monitoring by senior leaders and governors. Governors now receive detailed reports on the impact of pupil premium spending on pupils' progress. The chair of governors was able to talk knowledgeably about the progress of disadvantaged pupils as a result of the information they receive.
- I looked at the documentation relating to the monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment. I found that you have improved systems since the last inspection. You now focus on the impact of teaching and assessment on pupils' progress. The impact of teaching is monitored regularly, by senior and subject leaders, using a variety of information.
- My final line of enquiry was about attendance. Recent published data suggested that although attendance overall was above the national average, the persistent absence for one group of pupils was well above average. Our discussion quickly explained that these were legitimate absences. Looking at attendance figures for pupils currently in the school, I am content that attendance is well managed and

that it remains above average.

- Behaviour around the school and in lessons is exemplary, as reported in the previous inspection. Pupils are polite and welcoming. Pupils who joined the school mid-way through the year told me they settle in quickly because pupils and staff made them feel welcome.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching accelerates the progress of pupils so more reach above expected standards by the end of each key stage
- teachers provide more activities that challenge pupils to think in greater depth and apply their knowledge and understanding to their work
- pupils have more opportunities to develop their reasoning skills in mathematics through problem-solving activities
- the English curriculum is modified to include a wider range of topics that will encourage more boys to write at length.

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

Yours sincerely

Caroline Pardy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you, the science leader and the chair of governors. I spoke with a representative of the local authority over the phone. We conducted a tour of the school together and visited all classes to see pupils and staff at work. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school and during lessons, and met with a group of pupils from Years 4, 5 and 6. Together, we looked at samples of pupils' work across a range of subjects. I listened to a group of boys read. I also looked at a number of documents, including information about pupils' progress, your school self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, documents relating to safeguarding and information posted on the school's website. I considered the views of 75 parents who replied to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, which included 42 free-text responses, and the 111 responses to the school's recent parent survey. I also took into account the views of the three staff who completed the staff questionnaire.