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Mrs Bonney
Headteacher
Robert Arkenstall Primary School
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Dear Mrs Bonney

Short inspection of Robert Arkenstall Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 1 February 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since your appointment in September 2016, having previously been deputy headteacher, you have brought a calm and positive style of leadership to the school. You work well with your new deputy headteacher and your effective governing body. You have maintained high levels of challenge to staff, while ensuring that the school continues to be a happy and friendly place in which to work and learn.

There is a strong sense of teamwork across the school. Staff ensure that the school's motto, 'Pursue Possibilities: Love Learning' is reflected in all aspects of its work. Together, you have established a culture where pupils develop an 'I Can Do' attitude towards learning. They show good resilience and confidence when working, and they develop a love of learning.

Pupils behave well and enjoy school, especially the way that the curriculum supports creativity and sport. Pupils sing tunefully in assembly. They say that they enjoy performing in concerts. In physical education, they willingly improve their fitness by running a 'Golden Mile', or by joining clubs such as dance and netball.

You and your staff work together well to provide a stimulating and welcoming

school environment, where pupils' successes are celebrated. There is a delightful atmosphere in 'Special Day' assemblies when pupils contribute to 'books' that highlight their friends' personal qualities.

Pupils continue to make good progress across the school. Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 6 in 2016 was above average in reading, writing and mathematics. At the last inspection, the school was asked to improve the levels of challenge for the most able pupils in mathematics. As new leaders, this is your current focus. You have successfully improved the teaching of reading and writing, ensuring that pupils, including the most able, are challenged well. You know that this is not yet as consistently effective in mathematics and that the pitch of work is not quite right for the most able, slowing their progress when this happens.

In your previous inspection, leaders were also asked to improve procedures for improving teaching. This has been tackled well by you and your predecessor. You have a good understanding of the current priorities in this area and these have been communicated clearly to staff. You have encouraged teachers to become reflective about their own practice. They are keen to improve, willingly sharing their good work with others in the school and elsewhere.

Most parents speak highly of the work of the school, and almost all would recommend it to others. Typical comments include, 'It is a friendly and welcoming school reflecting the nature of the village community' and, 'I would recommend this school to any parent, whether their child is outgoing, quiet, shy, studious or carefree.'

Safeguarding is effective.

The governing body and other leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and that appropriate and detailed records are kept. Governors and staff understand their responsibilities well. Statutory guidance is followed carefully regarding the vetting of staff.

You and your staff are vigilant about monitoring pupils who are at risk and, when needed, you take swift action to ensure that they are kept safe. The site manager is diligent in spotting and dealing with potential dangers, such as slippery leaves on the day of the inspection.

The pupils feel safe and happy at the school. They develop sensible attitudes to keeping themselves safe because the school teaches them about such things as road safety and how to stay safe online or when using social media and texts.

Inspection findings

- We met at the start of the inspection to agree the key lines of enquiry for my day in school. The first of these was boys' progress in writing in key stage 1. We agreed to look at this because, in 2016, boys attained less well than girls in national assessments at the end of Year 2. I found that writing is taught well

across the school, with boys and girls learning equally well. In order to inspire pupils to write creatively, your staff ensure that writing is engaging and fun. Consequently, pupils are extremely positive about writing, and they develop necessary skills. You are ensuring that boys who attained less well in Year 2 from lower starting points are given good support in the current year to help them catch up.

- As part of this key line of enquiry, I heard some pupils reading. I found that younger pupils who find reading difficult are able to use their phonics skills well when they read unfamiliar words. Most-able readers relish the opportunity to show off their reading skills. They happily talk about their favourite authors or genre.
- We also looked at progress in mathematics of the less able in key stage 2. This was a focus because national test results at the end of Year 6 in 2016 showed that the small number of less-able pupils had not made enough progress from the end of Year 2. You were able to explain the reasons for this underachievement. A scrutiny of pupils' books from across the school shows that the less able usually make good progress now, and that their needs are met well.
- We also looked at provision in the early years because I had limited information about attainment at the end of the Reception Year before the inspection. I found that children make good progress in the early years. In 2016, the proportion reaching a good level of development for their age increased and was above average. In the early years, there is an interesting and engaging curriculum that takes good account of the interests and aptitudes of both boys and girls. Teachers make good use of a well-resourced outdoor area to help children improve skills across the curriculum.
- You asked me to look at the impact of the new senior leadership team as one of the areas of focus for the inspection because you wanted me to test how well it was working. I found that the new leadership team has quickly got to grips with the next steps for the school. Together, you have high aspirations for the school and its pupils. You are very clear about how this is to be achieved. There is no complacency, and your thorough systems for checking provision have helped you tackle any relatively minor weaknesses quickly. We agreed that you now need to involve subject leaders more in your procedures for monitoring provision so that they can play a fuller part in securing improvements in their curriculum areas.
- Together, we checked the quality of provision for disadvantaged pupils because they did less well than others in Year 6 in 2016. I found that while outcomes were lower than usual for the disadvantaged, results were affected by pupils who joined the school late, in Year 6. Pupils' books and in-school assessments confirm that disadvantaged pupils make good progress across the school. However, you do not do enough to evaluate the impact of the different types of support given to these pupils so that you can be clear that all are being equally effective.
- As part of the inspection focus on safeguarding, we checked the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, which was below average in 2016. I am reassured that you are dealing with this effectively. You are working closely with outside agencies to support families to understand the importance of regular attendance information. In most cases, this has already

resulted in improved attendance for the current year.

- Finally, I looked at how well the school deals with bullying because some parents were concerned about this. I found that the school has suitable systems for dealing with occasional bullying. Pupils are very clear that bullying is a rare occurrence. They are confident that staff respond quickly to any concerns or worries that they may have. You and your governors have sensibly decided to hold a workshop for parents so that you can share with them in more detail how you respond to bullying. This is scheduled to be held shortly after the inspection.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able are always challenged to achieve their best in mathematics
- initiatives for supporting disadvantaged pupils are checked with greater rigour for their effect on the pupils' academic or social development so that you can be sure that all are working equally well
- the school's strategies for monitoring provision involve more middle leaders so that they can play a fuller part in securing improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Mike Capper
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Evidence collected on inspection included:

- observations of teaching and learning across the school during learning walks with the headteacher
- meetings with leaders, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority
- informal discussions with parents, and the scrutiny of 75 responses to the Ofsted 'Parent View' questionnaire
- the scrutiny of seven responses to the staff questionnaire
- consideration of a range of information supplied by the school, including checks on the quality of teaching, the school development plan and records relating to attendance and safeguarding procedures

- listening to some pupils reading
- scrutiny of school assessment information and pupils' books.