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Miss Karen Brown  
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Dear Miss Brown

### **Short inspection of Cubert School**

Following my visit to the school on 30 March 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 January 2013.

### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. For all who work or learn at your school, it is a place of fun and enjoyment. Your outlook and approaches are positive and solution-focused, whether supporting pupils in tackling any problems that might arise or driving through school improvements. Your upbeat attitude permeates through to all staff, who fully share in your vision of what effective education should be for the pupils you serve. A very strong sense of teamwork and collaboration exists because of your care to recruit the right staff and governors. All who I spoke with during the inspection used the terms 'honest, trusting and open' to describe your leadership. Most importantly, pupils emulate these qualities in the way they conduct themselves, act towards each other and adults and tackle their work.

Your open and inclusive manner fully meets your stated aims of being able to cater for all pupils' needs effectively. Outside agencies and parents often elect to send children to your school, following recommendations about the success you have had in helping pupils overcome significant personal or academic challenges. This was evident last year when a significant proportion of the small Year 6 cohort arrived during key stage 2 having had challenging educational experiences elsewhere. Others had personal or medical circumstances that made them vulnerable. Despite

your best efforts, their academic progress suffered. The school's published data in 2016 does not represent pupils' typical performance. Pupils make good academic progress and a high quality of work in pupils' books is evident across a range of subjects.

Diversity is celebrated and differences are promoted well through your inclusive ethos and broad curriculum. As part of your school motto says, 'Everyone is welcome at our party, whatever they bring'. Pupils therefore learn in a very safe and caring environment where adults tailor activities to meet pupils' individual needs exceptionally well. Because your school values and ethos are acted out by adults and pupils alike, all challenge injustice, and learn or play together at ease with one another. Pupils demonstrate a strong 'moral compass' of right and wrong. Your strong pastoral focus is supporting pupils to overcome emotional and social barriers to learning. It is also providing rich experiences for developing the skills required to enable pupils to face any future challenges with confidence. Parents are supportive of your approach.

Humour is used to good effect by you, other leaders and teachers across your school when persuading, motivating or cajoling pupils to achieve as well as they can. You are careful to mix this approach with competitive activities that inspire all pupils to progress at a rapid pace. As a result, you have successfully tackled the areas for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection. Pupils love coming to school and their attendance has improved. When entering classes, pupils light up, keen and eager to share their work and achievements. A 'root and branch' overhaul of the teaching of phonics by your leader for English has resulted in precise and technically accurate teaching by adults across the early years and key stage 1. High-quality activities develop pupils' decoding strategies when reading unfamiliar words, alongside their understanding of this new vocabulary.

A broad range of monitoring activities are used from which improvements are identified. Your new system to check the achievement of pupils includes significant amounts of information on the personal development and attainment of pupils. You agree that your written monitoring records now need a sharper focus on the precise gains in knowledge, skill and understanding made by different groups of pupils. This would allow even more penetrating analyses of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You and your leadership team ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Policies and practice keep abreast of recent legislation and good practice. Staff attend update training regularly so that they are vigilant and mindful of the potential dangers to pupils. Your close links and proactive work with other professionals, such as social workers, ensure that referrals for more specialist

support are managed well. Your investment in supporting pupils' emotional development is successful. Specific sessions for those pupils who may be vulnerable provide the time and space for a trusting relationship to develop between the adult and the child so that discussion is open and honest. Pupils quickly develop their own range of strategies for dealing with their feelings; this helps them prepare for challenging situations in the future.

There is a strong sense of belonging in the school community. Parents recognise you as someone who will always listen to their views and who is willing to act to make a positive difference to their children's lives and their own lives. Teaching pupils about the values of respect, tolerance and open acceptance is one of the cornerstones of your work. You and your team have created a culture where difference, in whatever form it may take, is accepted and celebrated. This prepares pupils well for the realities of life beyond the school gates.

### **Inspection findings**

- During this inspection we explored whether the gap in performance between girls and boys in reading and writing was closing. We also looked at how well teaching and the curriculum in mathematics is enabling girls to achieve as well as they can. Together we investigated how well the school's strategy for supporting disadvantaged pupils was working and how effective support was for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Your English subject leader has re-energised the teaching of phonics and early reading to meet the needs of boys better. Activities planned ensure, for example, that Year 1 boys accurately use 'ai' sounds to spell words such as 'rain' when writing. Work on sounds is reinforced well through homework activities such as 'smoothie making'. Accurate spelling and letter formation and good presentation of ideas typify pupils' work. As a result, standards in the Year 1 phonics check this year are on track to be above average.
- This good early start in phonics is built on well as pupils move through the school. Adults use mistakes such as 'it creps from the tap, it has three grin feet', to reinforce pupils' learning well. When aspects of grammar and punctuation are explained alongside pupils' understanding of letters and the sounds they make, progress is rapid, especially for boys. Older boys use their earlier grounding in reading well to identify time conjunctions and imperative verbs when writing instructions. Listening to adults' good use of intonation and expression when reading stories aloud sparks boys' enthusiasm for, and interest in, reading.
- Your approach to developing all pupils' use and knowledge of new vocabulary to aid their writing is consistently applied across the school and is proving successful. Paired work, with a strong emphasis on talking about texts, words and themes particularly promotes boys' use of language well. Boys' work, when writing descriptions of characters, is therefore characterised by an impressive selection of adventurous words such as 'atrocious', 'magnificent' and 'curiously'.

- Boys' imagination in writing is captured when studying topics such as 'The Wonderful World'. Activities link the technical aspects of writing together with topical issues such as endangered species. Teachers plan activities to maximise the benefit of this approach, such as in Year 5 when writing, as an animal, to apply for a job. Boys are fired up during such experiences and creative in their ideas; for example, to write as a lion applying for a job in a butchers' shop. Occasionally during such activities the precise aspect of pupils' learning and their understanding of the impact of their word, sentence and punctuation choices is lost.
- Your leader for mathematics has a good understanding of what constitutes high-quality mathematics across the school. In line with the national curriculum guidelines, methods to develop pupils' conceptual understanding are in place. Some good examples to support pupils' understanding of shape are used in Year 6. For example, pupils are challenged when asked to use their knowledge of angles, parallelograms and polygons to find supplementary angles. Girls demonstrated their good knowledge when explaining why a right-angled triangle cannot also contain an obtuse angle.
- However, your chosen approach to planning activities during mathematical lessons of 'starting off, moving on and extending learning' does not develop pupils' fluency, variation and problem solving sufficiently well. Activities often only use bigger numbers to present an additional challenge. Such tasks do not require any new mathematical thinking or provide pupils with the variation required to challenge their thinking or probe their problem-solving skills in a given concept. Therefore pupils' mathematical fluency is being held back.
- Disadvantaged pupils thrive in your school. Your open, nurturing and caring approach ensures that all pupils are happy and confident to ask for help, no matter what the issue. Adults quickly check and intervene where necessary, liaising very closely with parents, who fully appreciate the care their children receive. Cultural experiences and your rich curriculum serve all pupils well, but especially disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, the progress of all pupils at the school is strong.
- Support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is very effective. The school caters for a number of pupils with profound and complex needs. Adults deliver high-quality guidance and use techniques that ensure pupils' needs are fully met. Your chosen method of using practical approaches to support pupils' development of mathematical concepts using apparatus is successful. Access to the appropriate equipment such as large paper, resources in Braille or new technologies support pupils' learning effectively and ensure their full access to the curriculum. As a result, pupils make good progress, are fully included and feel exceptionally well supported at the school.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- activities promote pupils' understanding of the effect of their word, sentence and punctuation choices on the reader when writing
- activities develop pupils' mathematical fluency and problem-solving skills
- the new system for tracking pupils' progress, and the quality of written monitoring records, are improved, embedded and used to identify precise gains in knowledge, skills and understanding of key groups.

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

Yours sincerely

Richard Light

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and with the leaders for English, mathematics and special educational needs. Three members of the governing body, including the chair, met me to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. The views of a number of parents were gathered through their responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Visits to classrooms were conducted jointly with you to evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' learning, to review the quality of pupils' work over time, and to listen to pupils read and talk informally with them about their experiences of school. A range of documentary evidence was evaluated, including documents relating to safeguarding and governance.