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Mrs Charlotte Tudway
Essendon CofE (VC) Primary School
School Lane
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Hertfordshire
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Dear Mrs Tudway

Short inspection of Essendon CofE (VC) Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 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 April 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 and your leadership team have maintained the positive ethos identified at the previous inspection, where pupils develop well both academically and socially. Parents are appreciative of the care that staff provide for pupils. Parents reflected on the 'nurturing and inspiring environment', the 'exceptionally hard-working and caring teachers' and the 'friendly, happy school' in the comments they wrote in Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

Although you are relatively new to the school, you have made swift progress in improving it. You have prioritised the key areas identified for improvement in the school development plan. You have supported the transformation of the early years area and raised the profile of mathematics teaching so that pupils make more rapid progress in their learning. You employed external local authority subject advisers to support improvements in the teaching of mathematics very effectively. You have plans in place throughout the school to develop reading for enjoyment further, to ensure that pupils read regularly and enthusiastically.

The school has tackled the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report well. You have rightly focused on ensuring that the quality of teaching throughout the school is at least good. Your monitoring and reviews, the work in pupils' exercise books and the assessment information confirm that teaching is consistently good. I saw evidence of the most able pupils being stretched in their understanding and application of shape and angle problems in mathematics. Pupils

were also able to work independently and to consider the methods they had developed to solve the problems.

The governing body is robust and well informed, enabling governors to hold you and your leadership team to account. Their work is explicitly linked to the school improvement priorities and they are able to gather useful information to inform improvements. Governors are critically aware of the unique context of the school and work hard to support the needs of every pupil.

Pupils are very well behaved, both within the classroom and in the playground. They are thoughtful, kind and generous with their time and support. In lessons, pupils are eager to learn. They are attentive and listen to instructions well. The split nature of each class (whereby two year groups study together) works very well. Pupils challenge and support each other very well in their learning. They are diligent in completing the challenges that they select for themselves and excited about gaining new skills.

You have ensured that pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum, including opportunities to learn about the outside world through daily discussions about topical news stories. Pupils I spoke to were very thoughtful about the ways in which they engaged in democratic processes in school. Pupils talked about the prestige of standing for election to be team captains and vice-captains, as well as running for membership of the student council.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the school's leaders, including governors, have ensured that all safeguarding processes are fit for purpose. Child protection concerns are taken seriously, appropriate action is taken when necessary and detailed records are kept. Arrangements for the safer recruitment of staff are robust. The school's single central register of employment checks meets statutory guidelines.

Pupils feel very safe at school. Pupils I spoke to stated categorically that bullying did not happen at Essendon. Pupils were acutely aware of the dangers of being online and how to keep themselves safe. As a small school, the pupils I spoke to felt that pupils treated each other like members of a family. Pupils like the team system and say that it provides a very effective support, such as team captains and vice-captains as a source of help and friendship.

Inspection findings

- In order to check whether the school remains good, I agreed a number of lines of enquiry with you. The first line of enquiry concerned whether the proportion of children reaching a good level of development in Reception was sustained. The previous inspection report identified concerns about the sufficiency of resources and the support for children to practise their writing and calculation skills in the early years.

- Leaders have taken a range of appropriate actions to improve children’s learning experiences in both the Nursery and Reception. The external space has been carefully restructured to facilitate children’s engagement in developing a breadth of skills, including reading, writing, mathematics and communication. Adult support is thoughtfully responsive to children’s needs and, as a result, children are focused on the activities and highly collaborative in their play, thereby helping to consolidate their communication skills.
- Since the Nursery and Reception share the same, well-resourced space, transition between the stages has been easy. Children’s skills are developed throughout the early years, ensuring that they are ready for learning in Year 1. However, disadvantaged children do not make the same level of progress as their peers. Leaders are aware of the difference in outcomes and have introduced a range of strategies to support disadvantaged children. The impact of the strategies cannot yet be measured as it is too early.
- The second area of focus was the effectiveness of mathematics teaching across the school. The previous inspection report noted the difference in outcomes between English and mathematics. Leadership of mathematics is now particularly strong and you correctly judge the provision of mathematics throughout key stage 1 and key stage 2 to be a strength of the school.
- Strong leadership has ensured that pupils make rapid progress in developing skills, knowledge and understanding of mathematics. Evidence in books, observations of lessons and talking to pupils demonstrated that pupils are making good progress, while some pupils make accelerated progress. Staff have high expectations, which pupils strive to meet. The introduction of independent learning challenges, whereby pupils choose their own tasks with varying levels of difficulty, has succeeded in accelerating pupils’ progress.
- Staff focus on developing pupils’ reasoning and mathematical fluency through a range of highly effective classroom strategies. Staff use specialised mathematical language as part of the language of learning and, as a result, pupils use mathematical language to support their discussions about mathematics. I observed pupils in all year groups discussing in pairs how they had solved mathematics problems. Pupils were able to articulate the different ways that they had approached problems.
- Staff encourage pupils to become more independent by choosing their own mathematics tasks, which vary in difficulty. I observed many pupils opting for difficult tasks as they evidently relished the challenge. However, some pupils were unsure of their next steps and how to challenge themselves further.
- The third key line of enquiry focused on how well the school accelerated the progress of the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, across the curriculum. I found that pupils make rapid progress in many areas of the curriculum but they cannot always articulate clearly what they have read. There are two well-structured libraries but pupils told me of their frustration at not being able to choose freely the books they would like to read. The use of a commercial reading system has evidently supported reluctant readers to engage with texts, but many of the most able readers have become disengaged.

- The final focus was the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements across the curriculum. I found that the school has very clear systems of support and pupils know who to go to if they have an issue. The school has provided pupils with a clear understanding of how to keep themselves safe when online.
- Attendance remains an issue for some pupils but the school has worked hard to ensure that all pupils have access to a good education. A range of strategies are applied and their effectiveness is continually reviewed. As a result, all groups of pupils make good progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils have access to a wider range of texts to improve their enjoyment of reading
- disadvantaged children in the early years reach a good level of development in line with other children nationally
- teachers' feedback to pupils helps them to challenge themselves further.

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

Susan Aykin
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During the course of this inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior and middle leaders and a group of five governors, including the chair of governors.
- I spoke with pupils informally in classrooms and when walking around the school site. I also met with a group of 12 pupils.
- During two tours of the school with you, I visited each class and observed pupils at work.
- I undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work in their books and folders.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, along with the school's record of checks carried out on staff working at the school.
- A range of documents were analysed or discussed, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, documents relating to pupils' achievement,

attendance and behaviour, minutes of governors' meetings and curriculum plans.

- I considered the views of 32 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the views parents expressed via free text.