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Ms Beck Barber-Stubbs
Principal
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Dear Ms Barber-Stubbs

Short inspection of Easton Royal Academy

Following my visit to the school on 3 May 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 July 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 have provided determined and energetic leadership since your appointment as principal in January 2015. You have successfully brought the school through a period of significant change in staff. By keeping a focus on the quality of teaching and learning, you have secured improvements in pupils' progress. At the same time as raising expectations of what pupils can achieve, you have retained the ethos of this small village school. Staff morale is high because you have developed a climate of trust and provided high-quality professional development opportunities. Parents support your efforts and, as a result, there are close links between the school and the local community. Many volunteers offer their time to the school, for example to support pupils with their reading. All of the parents who responded to the Parent View online survey would recommend this school to another parent.

Pupils are well mannered and extremely courteous. Teachers plan learning activities which enable pupils to work together well in mixed-age classes. Staff know the pupils as individuals and support them effectively according to their different needs. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of Reception Year has risen each year for three years and is now in line with the national average. Pupils make strong progress in reading and writing and, consequently, by the end of key stage 2, pupils' attainment in both is well above

average. Pupils enjoy reading and are eager to discuss their favourite books and authors. During the inspection, I found numerous examples of well-developed handwriting with consistently well-formed characters. Particularly accurate geometrical drawing in mathematics exemplified the widespread high quality of pupils' presentation and the great pride they take in their work.

Since the previous inspection, you have successfully addressed an area for improvement concerning pupils' writing skills. You have introduced more opportunities for pupils to write at length. This has developed pupils' stamina when composing and contributed to the good progress they now make in writing in key stage 2. Year 1 pupils' attainment in phonics fell below the national average in 2015. Although attainment rose in 2016 and was close to the national figure, you have recognised this area as a focus for further improvement.

In 2016, pupils' progress in mathematics was not as strong as in other areas of the curriculum. Consequently, pupils' attainment in mathematics did not match the high standards set in reading and writing. You have appointed a new middle leader to take responsibility for mathematics. As a result of their strong leadership, the quality of teaching and learning in this subject has begun to improve rapidly across the school.

The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is high. In the past, many of these pupils did not make the progress they were capable of. You have taken decisive action to evaluate rigorously the interventions and support that staff provide for these pupils. Consequently, because extra help for these pupils is better targeted, their progress has improved.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have worked closely with the Excalibur Academies Trust to ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. For example, specialists from the trust regularly carry out health and safety checks around the school site. Effective policies and practices are in place to make sure that pupils are safe and well looked after. You know the needs of your pupils and their families well and this contributes to the effectiveness of your safeguarding work. Where pupils are in need of help, you liaise effectively with external agencies, for example healthcare professionals.

Pupils feel safe at school and their parents agree with their views. Pupils receive advice and guidance about potential risks and so they understand how to stay safe in a variety of different situations. Pupils from the school council were proud to tell me about a video they had produced which describes how to use the internet safely. Pupils I spoke to were confident that when conflict or disagreement occurs between pupils, staff are quick to respond. Any form of bullying is rare at this school.

All staff receive effective safeguarding training when they join the school and this is regularly updated. Consequently, staff understand the actions they should take if

they are concerned about a pupil's welfare. As the designated leader for safeguarding you have made sure that all staff are well aware of their responsibilities and feel confident to talk about safeguarding issues openly. Hence, a vigilant culture of safeguarding is well established throughout the school.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and governors, with the support of the trust, have a good understanding of the performance of the school. Governors receive accurate information from school leaders about the progress of different groups of pupils. As a consequence of better presentation of this information, they now evaluate the effectiveness of the school's improvement strategies more precisely than in the past.
- One of the key lines of enquiry to determine if the school remained good was to evaluate how well the school develops pupils' phonics skills in key stage 1. In 2015, a lower proportion of pupils attained the expected standard in phonics by the end of Year 1 than was seen nationally. Leaders identified weaknesses in the later stages of the phonics teaching programme. Pupils were not mastering the more complex sounds and irregular words before moving on. As a result of better planning, teachers now ensure that pupils are confident with these skills before progressing on to other work. Pupils' attainment in phonics in 2016 showed improvement. Current pupils' progress in phonics shows that this improvement is continuing. However, to sustain this trend of improvement, leaders recognise the need to share across all staff the best practice in phonics teaching in the school.
- In 2016, key stage 2 pupils' attainment in English grammar, punctuation and spelling was average; however, pupils' attainment in the spelling element of this assessment was below average. Teachers use assessment information well to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Teachers follow up any misconceptions quickly in order to boost pupils' understanding and help them keep up with their peers. This has strengthened pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar in general. However, teaching is not helping pupils apply these skills beyond their work in English. Consequently, a minority of pupils are not confident when spelling key words in other subjects.
- Another key line of enquiry considered the effectiveness of mathematics teaching. Pupils' progress in mathematics has lagged behind their progress in other subjects in recent years because the quality of teaching has not improved at the same rate as in other curriculum areas. The appointment of a new coordinator for mathematics in September 2016, and the introduction of an effective strategic plan, have led to improvements in mathematics teaching. Staff have worked closely with each other to learn about and develop specific aspects of classroom practice. Although some gaps in Year 6 pupil's understanding still exist as a legacy of previous weaker teaching, pupils' progress in mathematics is increasing throughout the school. Teachers are becoming more adept at developing pupils' ability to do calculations quickly and confidently and to explain their reasoning when solving problems. However, you recognise a need for further improvement.
- A third key line of enquiry evaluated the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Historically, the identification of these

pupils' needs did not happen early enough after they joined the school and the subsequent support was not evaluated sufficiently to gauge its success. Leaders have taken effective action to address both these issues. Pupils' needs are now assessed earlier and, therefore, those pupils who need extra help receive it sooner. Leaders have an accurate view of these pupils' progress and use this to ensure that any support makes a genuine difference to their achievement. Consequently, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are now making good progress.

- Good relationships between pupils and staff permeate the school. Pupils of all backgrounds feel valued and included. Parents show strong support for the principal and staff and this has made a good contribution to the improvements that have taken place. One parent's comment was typical of many: 'The feel of a small village school has not been forgotten, which is a positive, but the outlook extends far past the village boundary.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers further develop pupils' skills in mathematical calculation and reasoning
- the teaching of phonics is improved by providing further training for staff
- teachers help pupils recognise and spell key words in different subjects across the curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I held meetings with you, governors and the chief executive officer of the Excalibur Academies Trust. I held a telephone conversation with the chair of the local governing body. I spoke with pupils from the school council and with many other pupils informally. I made observations of learning in all classes and looked at examples of pupils' work. I scrutinised documentation from the school on a range of matters, including safeguarding. I took account of 43 responses from parents to the Ofsted online survey Parent View, one email and two letters. I also considered responses of pupils and staff to the Ofsted online survey.