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Chiquita Henson
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Dear Ms Henson

Short inspection of Cirencester Deer Park School

Following my visit to the school on 16 May 2017 with Ofsted inspector Malcolm Davison, 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.

Your leadership has created a school ethos that pupils, parents and staff all subscribe to enthusiastically. Your ambition and drive to meet the needs of every child are valued across the school and into the community the school serves. A large number of parents replied to the online survey and they are virtually unanimous in recommending the school. One respondent summed up the collective parental view when they said, 'I feel that Cirencester Deer Park has achieved an excellent balance between challenging and developing pupils academically and enriching the whole learning experience.'

Your leadership has ensured that, overall, pupils make more academic progress than they do in the majority of schools across the country. This has been the case for a number of years. Pupils benefit from particularly effective teaching in English, science, history and geography. In these subjects especially, pupils are challenged to stretch themselves and to solve difficult problems. In 2016, however, disadvantaged pupils made significantly less progress than their peers in other schools. Rightly, this has been a cause for concern for you and your team has reacted well to the challenge.

The governing body is a strength of the school. Since the last inspection, governors have taken the decision to reconstitute the governing body in order to ensure it

contained the set of skills necessary to lead the school. They were keen to do this without losing the passion and commitment to the school and its pupils that had been their hallmark. They have succeeded admirably. As a result, they are able to analyse and respond to the detailed and regular reports they receive from you and hold you to account appropriately. Their understanding of the school, and hence their capacity for strategic leadership, is further strengthened by their regular contact with both staff and parents.

You have put in place an effective structure in which senior and middle leaders monitor their areas of responsibility and intervene when required. Your middle leaders feel appropriately challenged and supported in ensuring that the quality of teaching in their areas is strong and that pupils can reach their potential.

Your leadership team and staff maintain a very positive working atmosphere for pupils. As a result, pupils' attitudes to learning are generally very good. They work well in lessons, they are keen to answer questions and they want to succeed. Pupils say they feel very well supported by staff. Around the school site, pupils behave well. They are friendly, good-natured and respectful.

Working with your governing body, you have reacted effectively to the last Ofsted inspection. The report recommended that you focus on continuing to raise the quality of teaching and on ensuring that pupils make as much progress in mathematics as they do in other subjects. You and your senior colleagues have made it clear to teachers that you have high expectations of them and you have acted robustly when your expectations have not been met. You have also created a rich palette of training opportunities and an environment where teachers feel encouraged to reflect on their own teaching and so further improve their classroom practice. Teachers feel that the training they receive is well targeted and useful. As a result of your approach, teachers are refining their teaching and pupils are making better progress.

There has been an improvement in the progress pupils make in mathematics. You have overcome recruitment and staffing difficulties to develop leadership capacity within the department. This, in turn, has led to improvements in the quality of teaching, and hence the progress pupils make. Pupils are now benefiting from a good range of challenging activities, including being asked to solve problems in real-life contexts. While some inconsistencies remain to be ironed out, it is clear that pupils are now making good progress in mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leadership team have ensured that there is a strong culture of safeguarding pupils throughout the school. You have made sure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are of high quality. Staff are appropriately trained and take their duties very seriously. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe from threats online via a comprehensive series of assemblies and lessons.

There is an effective structure in place to support vulnerable pupils. Pupils value the school's counselling service. Staff work well with parents and with external agencies to further support those pupils who are struggling with difficult personal circumstances.

Inspection findings

At the start of the day, we agreed that the inspection would focus on the progress of disadvantaged pupils, on the progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and on the effectiveness of the leadership of teaching. In addition you asked that we consider the progress of the most able pupils.

- The school prides itself on ensuring that it meets the needs of all its pupils. However, disadvantaged pupils did not make good progress last year. Outcomes were affected by the poor progress of a small number of pupils who were facing significant challenges in their lives. School leaders have analysed the support they put in place for this group last year and have adapted their plans for spending the pupil premium grant appropriately as a consequence.
- The progress that disadvantaged pupils are now making from their starting points is broadly comparable to that of their classmates. However, they do have lower rates of attendance than other pupils and so are vulnerable to falling behind. Although leaders have increased their focus on attendance for this group, absence rates remain stubbornly high. Teachers do make sure that when disadvantaged pupils return from absence, they receive additional support to help them catch up. This is valued by pupils.
- The progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and receive additional support was below the national average in 2016. Leaders have responded to this quickly. A new special educational needs leadership team has been formed and it is already beginning to have an impact. School leaders are investing wisely in training for the team to increase its effectiveness further.
- Teachers are able to tailor their support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities because they have detailed and accurate advice from the special educational needs team. This is beginning to improve the progress of these pupils. However, the persistent absence of some pupils who have special educational needs is affecting their progress. Leaders are aware of this and are working with pupils and parents to address it.
- The leadership of teaching is strong. Improving the quality of teaching is right at the forefront of the school's work. There are effective systems in place to check that teaching is consistently good and all teachers are committed to improvement. Leaders encourage teachers to study current research about effective teaching and apply it to their own classrooms. Teachers make sure that their improved practice leads to improving outcomes for the pupils. They are sharing their findings and so spreading effective practice across the school.
- Leaders encourage middle leaders to learn from each other. Leaders of English and mathematics are working together closely and, as a result, the quality of teaching in their departments continues to improve.

- Leaders rigorously review the performance of departments when necessary to improve performance. They use external consultants to ensure reviews are robust and thorough. The conclusions are accepted and acted on. There has been a demonstrable improvement in the progress of pupils in the departments reviewed.
- The performance of the most able pupils has been broadly comparable with that of their peers nationally over the last few years. Leaders and teachers are working hard to improve on that. Pupils are now being stretched by appropriately challenging work across a broad range of subjects. They are routinely asked to consider complex problems and explain their solutions. Pupils enjoy the challenge and react well to it. Most pupils respond well to teachers' feedback and try diligently to improve their work. Consequently, the most able pupils are making good progress.
- Teachers have raised their expectations of younger most-able pupils across the curriculum. Year 7 pupils in mathematics, for example, are building on their primary school work and addressing concepts that previously would be addressed in Year 9. They are tackling the challenge with confidence and obvious enjoyment. Consequently, they are making strong progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that teachers continue to improve teaching, learning and assessment of disadvantaged pupils so that they make the progress of which they are capable.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Lovett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, Ofsted inspector Malcolm Davison and I met with you, senior leaders, governors, staff and pupils. We visited lessons jointly with senior leaders to observe learning and looked at the quality of work in pupils' books. We considered documentary evidence relating to the impact of the school's work, including safeguarding, attendance and the use of the pupil premium grant. We took into account 220 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, a parental letter, 79 responses to the staff survey and 101 responses to the pupil survey.