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Mr Lee Frost
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Dear Mr Frost

Short inspection of Great Paxton CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 4 July 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. The school is continuing to improve. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of their Reception Year has risen over the past three years and was above the national average in 2016. In the same year, all Year 1 pupils met the required standard in their phonics test. By the end of key stage 2, a greater proportion of your pupils reach the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics than in other schools nationally.

You have recently increased the leadership capacity at the school. You are ably supported by your deputy headteacher and the special educational needs coordinator in your drive to continue to improve the school. Together, you all lead the school well. You have ensured that staff changes and times of unplanned absences have not disrupted the learning opportunities for pupils. You have also gained the absolute support of your staff who relish being part of a team that shares a common goal to ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to achieve their best.

Since the previous inspection, you and your governing body have taken on the management of the on-site nursery in order to ensure its future stability. This exemplifies your belief that the school is at the heart of your community.

Pupils told me how much they enjoy coming to school. The positive relationships

between staff and pupils are evident in every classroom. This is a school where every pupil is known as an individual, not only because the school is small, but because of the values that underpin everything you do. Pupils are taught British values and are encouraged to develop their own 'values for life', such as compassion and forgiveness. The school is a harmonious place where staff and pupils listen to each other and embrace each other's differences. Older pupils provide support for younger ones by acting as 'peer mediators' to help them resolve minor concerns or issues at break and lunchtimes. Pupils say that helping others, either with their learning or socially, 'makes you feel good inside'.

Pupils want to do well and the pride they take in their learning is clear from their well-presented workbooks and their positive behaviour in lessons. Pupils welcomed me as a visitor to their school and were keen to talk about their learning and what it was like to be a pupil at Great Paxton. Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were overwhelmingly supportive of the school, agreeing that their children are happy and well looked after.

Since the previous inspection, you have increased the opportunities that pupils have to write at length as part of your drive to raise attainment in writing. This resulted in nearly a quarter of your Year 6 pupils reaching the higher standard in their national tests in 2016. The feedback that teachers give to pupils, especially in mathematics and writing, is increasingly effective in helping them to move their learning on quickly.

Your teachers have a clear philosophy that pupils write best from experience and so they work hard to provide pupils with activities that stimulate their imaginations. This leads to some unusual experiences that your pupils have thoroughly enjoyed. For example, in order to develop understanding of the secrecy of diary writing, your pupils came to school in their pyjamas and wrote underneath duvets. Pupils also get many opportunities to share and celebrate their writing with parents. Your 'friendship forest' makes the perfect setting for pupils to read their stories and their poetry to their parents. In early years, writing clearly has a much higher profile, with examples of the children's work displayed around the classroom as well as featuring in their learning journals.

Your provision for the small number of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, or for those pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium funding, is well tailored to meet their individual needs. Because of this bespoke support, both these groups of pupils make good progress from their starting points.

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that staff are well informed and trained about new safeguarding guidance through regular training and updates. Staff understand their responsibilities and know what to do if they have any concerns. Pupils who spoke to me during the inspection said that they feel safe. Parents overwhelmingly agree that their children are kept safe in the school.

The school helps to raise awareness in children of how to keep themselves safe by including lessons on subjects such as e-safety, drugs and anti-bullying. Pupils could explain the differences between people being unkind to each other and bullying and said that very little of either occurs in school. Most importantly, pupils believe that it is right to speak out if they feel something is wrong and have confidence that adults will support them.

Your governors actively fulfil their statutory duties to ensure that pupils are safe in school. They rigorously check that safeguarding policies and procedures meet current requirements and are effective. This includes checks that are carried out on new staff and support that is in place for more vulnerable pupils.

Inspection findings

- To determine whether the school remains good, one of my lines of enquiry was to look at how well your most-able pupils achieve in reading and mathematics by the end of key stage 2. In 2016, a smaller proportion of your Year 6 pupils achieved the higher standard in reading and mathematics than they did in writing. One of the strengths of your leadership is knowing when to use external support to make change happen quickly. Using the expertise of local authority advisers, you have overhauled the way that mathematics is taught in a very short space of time. From a scrutiny of pupils' books, it is clear that the most able pupils are now provided with many more opportunities to deepen and extend their mathematical skills than in the past. This new approach is also improving the progress of key stage 1 pupils. Information on how well pupils are doing indicates that it is likely that more current Year 2 pupils will reach greater depth in mathematics this year by the end of key stage 1 than was the case in 2016.
- Reading now has a higher profile in the school, with more guided reading sessions helping to develop skills such as inference and prediction. You have also sought the views of pupils about what will support their reading and so each classroom now has an interactive reading area for pupils to enjoy. Much of the work pupils do in subjects such as geography and history is linked to literature and so helps to deepen pupils' understanding of context. For example, Year 4 and Year 5 pupils were using Charles Dickens' 'Oliver Twist' not only to explore the way he uses similes and metaphors in his writing, but also what it was like to be a child living in poverty in Victorian England. Pupils read with enthusiasm and confidence and are developing skills that put them at least in line with other pupils of their age nationally.
- However, teachers do not always make the most of opportunities in lessons to match activities to the ability of different groups of pupils. Hence, the greater level of challenge for the most able pupils seen in mathematics is not yet consistent across the school in other subjects. At times, pupils of all abilities are still given the same tasks to complete. This means that not all pupils make the progress they are capable of across all areas.
- In 2016, attainment at the end of key stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics was below that of other schools nationally. It is clear from their books that these pupils are making better progress this year. Equally, some

pupils who did not reach greater depth in writing or mathematics last year are now working consistently at this level. Teachers regularly meet with you to discuss the progress of every pupil. At these meetings, any underachievement is identified and support arranged to help any pupils who have fallen behind to catch up. We discussed how these meetings might also be used to ensure that the most able pupils are being sufficiently challenged to make the accelerated progress of which they are capable.

- I also wanted to see how broad a curriculum you provide for your pupils beyond the subjects of English and mathematics and beyond the constraints of the school day. All of your teachers take on the leadership of curriculum areas to ensure that subjects are well represented in the cross-curricular projects that form the basis of the wider curriculum. For example, Year 3 pupils were studying the Romans and covered not only history in their lessons, but also art through mosaics, and drama through role play as survivors of Pompeii.
- While the cross-curricular approach to teaching the wider curriculum provides a rich and varied diet for pupils in all year groups, the progress that pupils make, for example in history, is not routinely tracked or evaluated. This means that teachers do not have a clear picture of how well subject-specific skills beyond reading, writing and mathematics are being developing by the curriculum.
- You have used the sport premium funding very effectively to improve access to both competitive sport and extra-curricular provision. Your school teams have competed in mini tennis tournaments, athletics and rugby and enjoyed victory in the 'small schools football tournament'. The work you have done in this area has recently been acknowledged by the award of the Silver School Games Mark. As well as sporting activities, your pupils also enjoy a range of other extra-curricular opportunities, including running their own gardening club. They cook with the produce they grow, which develops not only their awareness of where their food comes from, but also of the importance of healthy eating.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the cross-curricular projects develop specific skills in the subjects being taught as well as supporting the development of skills in English and mathematics
- teachers plan activities that challenge pupils of all abilities in all subjects, especially the most able pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Lesley Daniel
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your special educational needs coordinator and English subject leader, a member of the governing body and your school improvement partner.

I visited classes with you, where I observed pupils learning and talked to them about their work and their school. In lessons, we looked at pupils' work in books to determine the quality of learning over time and the quality of learning across the curriculum.

I spent time speaking informally with pupils in class and at lunchtime, as well as taking into account the views of the 19 pupils who completed the online Ofsted questionnaire. I also considered the 43 responses to Parent View, which included 19 free-text comments, and the 13 completed staff questionnaires.

I scrutinised the school's documents about safeguarding, including the record of checks on the suitability of each member of staff to work with children and young people, the school's own evaluation of its performance and your plans for school improvement.