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Mr Jonathan Hook
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hook

Short inspection of Chenies School

Following my visit to the school on 19 September 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 October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

Leaders and governors have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. After taking up your post as headteacher in January 2017, you made a number of carefully considered changes. Your enthusiasm, drive and determination in implementing these changes meant that the school has improved rapidly, following a period of declining outcomes. You have high ambitions for the school and are determined to provide the best education possible for its pupils. In addition, you have steadfastly sought to ensure that teachers feel excited and supported in their working environment. You have shown an unwavering commitment to delivering these aims, and in so doing inspired both staff and pupils. They fully support your vision for the school, as well as the approaches adopted in order to achieve it.

The relationships are strong between the school, its pupils and the parent body. There is a high level of agreement between stakeholders regarding how much the school has improved under your leadership. One parent commented: 'I have observed an extraordinary improvement in the school. [I am] very impressed with the communication, clarity and culture that has been introduced over the last year.' Pupils expressed similarly positive views, especially about the atmosphere around school and the way behaviour is managed. Following leaders and teachers clamping down on low-level disruption, behaviour throughout the school is now good. Most pupils display very positive attitudes to learning. Staff describe the school as calmer and pupils socialise well together at break and lunchtimes. One pupil commented that, 'teachers seem to care more' since the new headteacher came to the school.

The ethos in the school is powerfully upbeat as well as highly nurturing. Pupils enjoy learning across a wide range of subjects. Their understanding and knowledge is enhanced by approaches to learning which whet their intellectual curiosity and expand their horizons. The school makes very effective use of trips to museums, castles and places of geographical interest to support pupils' learning in humanities. Visits from inspirational speakers enhance pupils' wider understanding of the world and their sense of empathy.

You have wisely appointed two subject leaders, one for mathematics and the other for literacy. Subject leaders confidently assist other teachers and provide them with advice as to how best to implement agreed new approaches. You are developing their expertise in observing pupils' learning and following this up with feedback to teachers that is appropriately challenging. You acknowledge that new leaders are not yet confident in these aspects of their work. You sensibly have detailed plans in place to enhance subject leaders' expertise in monitoring and evaluating the impact of their work. Subject leaders are excited by the possibility of further training and development because they are eager to maximise their contribution to improving the school.

You, and your leaders, have also developed the way teachers assess pupils' learning in the core subjects. The new approach to assessment focuses more closely on ensuring that pupils master the skills, knowledge and understanding outlined in the national curriculum. As a result, it is now easier for teachers to identify any areas of learning in which pupils are less competent. It is also easier for pupils to identify what they need to do in order to become more adept. However, approaches to the assessment of writing do not always support pupils in making the rapid progress they need to catch up. You have wisely identified that the assessment system you have devised, although an improvement on the previous one, requires refinement.

You accurately judge that teaching improvements in key stage 1 and early years are more consistently effective than those in key stage 2. For instance, the areas for improvement relating to early years from the previous inspection report have been successfully implemented. Due to improvements in provision, including more opportunities for mark-making, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development at the end of Reception has been above national averages for the last three years. You have also effectively supported the early years lead in developing the phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) teaching programme. As a consequence, in 2017 there was a big improvement in the proportion of Year 1 pupils reaching the expected standard, when compared with 2016. Mathematics was similarly a key area for improvement in your previous inspection report. The work you have done across the school to improve mathematics teaching is paying dividends. Pupils have developed their numeracy knowledge well and apply it confidently when tackling problems. Teachers make good use of carefully chosen resources which enable pupils to become more fluent in key concepts and also boost their aptitude for mathematical reasoning.

Governance is strong and effective. The governing body has had to deal with some complex staffing issues; however, they have risen well to the challenge. Over the

past year, governors have also enhanced their capacity to hold the school's leaders to account. They have undertaken training, and the new chair of the governing body is mentored by a national leader of governance. Governors acknowledge that in the past they were too accepting of information the school provided for them about its own performance. They are now better able to scrutinise the information they receive.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and staff training is up to date and carefully monitored. Safeguarding records are well organised and you helpfully keep a clear chronological summary of all your dealings with the local authority's social care services. This enables you to monitor vigilantly how well any referrals to the authority's welfare services are progressing. You and your staff have lost no time in implementing the recommendations made following a recent safeguarding audit, which you sensibly commissioned a local headteacher to undertake. These recommendations included the challenging job of improving the perimeter fence.

Inspection findings

- As part of the inspection, I explored the impact of the appointment of a new headteacher on tackling relatively weaker areas in the school. There was a high level of agreement, as well as strong evidence, to corroborate the view that the changes you have made are having a positive impact. A local headteacher, funded in part by Buckinghamshire Learning Trust, has effectively supported you in your endeavours. In particular, she has assisted you well in prioritising which aspects needed immediate attention.
- During the inspection, I gathered evidence about the way you have worked with leaders and teachers to improve mathematics teaching. You have purchased effective new mathematical resources, including textbooks, that helpfully provide opportunities for pupils to apply their understanding to real-life problems. As a consequence, in 2017 the proportion of pupils in key stages 1 and 2 achieving age-related expectations in mathematics improved compared with 2016.
- I also looked at the way subject leaders have supported different groups of pupils in developing their writing and reading. Reading is now consistently strong across the school. The pupils I spoke with commented on how much they enjoyed taking books home to read and having the chance to discuss their reading with their parents, when filling in their reading record together. Pupils are helpfully guided by their class teachers to choose books that are challenging, yet accessible.
- Developments in writing are not as well embedded as those in mathematics. Pupils' progress in writing in the 2017 key stage 2 national curriculum assessments was below average. One reason for this is because new approaches to assessment are not yet supporting some pupils in making the rapid progress they need in order to catch up in their writing. Some tasks do not enable pupils to demonstrate fully the skills in which they are being assessed. Some pupils are

not clear enough about the grammatical conventions they will need to employ so as to achieve success in their writing.

- The early years leader works closely with parents to ensure that children make a smooth transition from pre-school to Reception. In particular, parents are given helpful tips on how to support their children when at home.
- Following weak phonics scores in 2016, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in phonics rose to 100% in 2017. This increase was due to a more tightly focused approach to delivering phonics.
- During the inspection, I explored how broad and balanced the curriculum is. Pupils' work on display and in books showed how their imagination and intellectual curiosity has been sparked by trips and visits. Impressive use is made of the natural flora and fauna in the grounds to support pupils' learning in science.
- I also gathered evidence about how well pupils behave and treat each other. The new system for rewards and sanctions is working well. Pupils I spoke with commented enthusiastically about how much of an incentive they found rewards for good behaviour. They also mentioned how sanctions helped them to understand how their actions affected those around them. One parent commented on free-text: 'It's a lovely school, with good values and the children there are polite, caring towards others and the school has a great community/family vibe.' Opinions in a similar vein were frequently expressed, and 100% of parents indicated on Parent View that they would recommend the school.
- Safeguarding was another area that I explored with you during the inspection. Of note is the dedication with which you have taken on board the role of designated leader for safeguarding. You diligently ensure that external agencies have all the information they need to respond to the referrals you make. For instance, you met with a social worker from the local authority during the summer holidays to ensure the necessary information was available for the local authority.
- Governance has come on in leaps and bounds, and governors are now much better at scrutinising data on pupils' progress and asking probing questions.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- refinements to assessment practices in writing better support pupils who need to make rapid progress in order to catch up.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I checked safeguarding arrangements, including the records of recruitment checks, policies and procedures. I reviewed a range of published information, including the school's website, and reviewed the school's self-evaluation. I visited all classes with the headteacher, where we observed learning and looked at pupils' work. I met with subject leaders to discuss the impact of their work to improve teaching. I also explored with them the changes made to assessment and the curriculum. I spoke with a group of teachers and also with a group of pupils. I also undertook a scrutiny of the work in pupils' books, met with members of the governing body, and spoke to representatives from the multi-academy trust. I reviewed records of behaviour and attendance. I considered 68 responses to the Parent View online questionnaire, 39 comments on free-text, 57 responses to the pupil survey and seven responses to the staff survey.