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Mrs Hayley Challinor
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Challinor

Short inspection of The Ashbeach Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 31 January 2018, 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 March 2014.

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 capable senior team clearly understand what is required to ensure the continual development of the school, including the quality of teaching. All leaders, including governors, bring clarity and purpose to their work. Staff willingly take their share of responsibilities for bringing about the improvement priorities identified by leaders. The school's motto, 'learning for life to be the best we can possibly be,' is a very positive influence on pupils' attitudes towards learning and they also receive high-quality support and care. As a result, pupils across the year groups are making good progress and their personal development is a strength. They are particularly aware of the need to respect other people's differences and the wider benefits to society which respect brings.

Parents and carers are very supportive of the school's work. This was shown during their meetings with me and in their responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. They are highly appreciative of the work which the school carries out to keep their children safe, care for them and help them to become successful learners. They are particularly supportive of the successful changes you have made in the teaching of mathematics and English. Parents report how easy it is to raise a concern should they have one, and praise the school's quick actions to deal with any problems. The vast majority of parents say they would recommend the school to others, and commend you and your senior team for always being available for them every day at the start of school.

Following the previous inspection, leaders were asked to improve the achievement of children in the early years and in mathematics by the end of key stage 1. You and your team have tackled both of these areas with success, as demonstrated by recent results and current teaching. In addition, the quality of pupils' creative writing has improved across the school. You agree that younger pupils' achievement in phonics was lower than national results in recent years, while the standards reached by Year 6 in mathematics, grammar and spelling did not represent the best progress of which pupils were capable. However, your accurate self-evaluation identified this and leaders have quickly brought about improvements in these areas. These include high-quality staff training, effective monitoring of teaching and accurate assessment of pupils' work, so that leaders can identify the next steps for improvement. Teachers have adopted successful approaches for the teaching of writing, phonics and mathematical skills. Consequently, the progress of those pupils currently in the school is secure and standards have risen quickly.

You and your leadership team agree that some mathematics teaching in key stage 2 should offer greater challenge to help pupils achieve the highest standards. You also agree that teachers should ensure that all pupils receive the help they need when they are unsure about how to tackle their work. Finally, you agree that pupils' written skills can be more fully developed by providing them with wider opportunities to write purposefully across the subjects of the curriculum.

Governors hold accurate views about the school's strengths and remaining areas for development. They are committed to the school, and the large size of the governing body demonstrates the positive support the school enjoys within the community. Governors provide a strong balance of support and challenge and do not refrain from asking tough questions of leaders. Working closely with leaders, governors help to establish accurate improvement priorities which focus on teaching and pupils' achievement. Their regular visits and records of work demonstrate their effective oversight of improvement plans.

Safeguarding is effective.

All leaders and governors work determinedly to ensure that there is a vigilant culture of safeguarding. Leaders use the latest government guidance and local knowledge to help all staff understand potential risks to children, and they ensure that every adult is suitably trained. Leaders responsible for safeguarding check that staff understand what to do in different situations and provide helpful advice to remind them. Consequently, staff respond quickly to any concerns and share them with leaders. They use information efficiently and vulnerable pupils receive high-quality care. Leaders also pass on any concerns to the appropriate agencies. They maintain frequent checks on vulnerable pupils and act quickly to help them if circumstances change.

Arrangements for checking the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children are effective. The school site is secure, as are arrangements for visitors to enter the buildings. Parents express full confidence in the school's work.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain that the school remains good, two of my lines of enquiry were about older pupils' achievement in mathematics and writing, and the quality of teaching in both subjects. Results in 2016 and 2017 suggested that some pupils had not reached the expected or higher standards they were capable of by the end of key stage 2 in mathematics, grammar, spelling and punctuation, particularly those with average starting points. Your own evaluation had identified this.
- The school's accurate assessment records show that pupils in all year groups currently at the school are making secure progress in mathematics and writing, including grammar, punctuation and spelling. Information about pupils in key stage 2 shows that the proportions reaching greater depth or higher standards have quickly improved, including those with average and higher starting points.
- Visits across lessons quickly confirmed the differences that improvements to teaching have made, particularly in key stage 2. Teachers make effective use of assessment information to plan activities which help pupils of different abilities overcome previous barriers. In English, pupils write with imagination but show greater purpose and control, especially over the structure of sentences, punctuation and the use of different tenses. Spelling standards have quickly improved because teaching helps pupils to understand and use the rules involved.
- Lesson visits to mathematics showed that teaching is challenging pupils of different abilities to make effective use of their knowledge by tackling complex arithmetic and calculations, and applying their knowledge of number rules. Activities frequently require them to make use of mathematical equipment to test their thinking and to develop their reasoning. Consequently, pupils have developed a more secure and skilful understanding of mathematics.
- Despite these improvements, scrutiny of pupils' work also indicated that some mathematics teaching is not offering pupils the most challenging work they are capable of, particularly some of the most able. You agreed with this. You also agreed that, in a few instances, pupils need more precise help in order to understand how to approach new work, so that they can make a good start to learning at the beginning of lessons. While pupils' writing is a strength in English, science and history, you also agreed that they do not currently complete written work to the same quality or depth in other subjects.
- My third line of enquiry was concerned with pupils' achievement in phonics. Previous results were below the standard achieved by pupils nationally and you set this as an improvement priority. Leaders have acted with urgency and introduced an effective new teaching approach. Observations of teaching and scrutiny of assessment records soon demonstrated that teaching has quickly improved pupils' knowledge of phonics. Teaching offers exciting activities which challenge pupils to solve mysteries and problems, while using their accurate pronunciation of the sounds made by letters and words. Consequently, pupils' knowledge is secure and their current achievement in phonics is good.

- My final line of enquiry concerned the effectiveness of leaders' work, particularly that of subject leaders, in bringing about improvements to teaching and pupils' progress. Your self-evaluation identified the necessity for subject leaders to make better use of assessment information in order to help teachers focus their planning on improving the learning of different groups of pupils. Evidence from the inspection demonstrates that subject leaders are effective and influential in their roles. Working with senior leaders, they accurately monitor the quality of teaching and use the findings to bring about further improvements. They have successfully introduced new approaches to the teaching of writing, mathematics and phonics which have had a decisive effect on pupils' progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils in key stage 2 mathematics classes, and particularly the most able, are quickly moved onto the most challenging work which further develops their skills as soon as they are ready
- pupils are provided with opportunities to develop their extended writing skills in other subjects across the wider curriculum, as well as in English, science and history
- teachers pay closer attention to any pupils who are unclear as to how to approach new work, and act precisely to help them overcome any misunderstandings.

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

Yours sincerely

David Turner
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During this short inspection, I met with you, senior leaders and four members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body.
- I also met with four members of staff to discuss their safeguarding knowledge and training.
- Accompanied by yourself, I visited lessons in all year groups, looked at pupils' work in books and spoke with pupils throughout the day. I also held a meeting with pupils from key stage 2.

- I reviewed school documentation, including the self-evaluation report and school improvement plan, assessment information, policies and information posted on the website.
- I scrutinised a range of documentation about the school's safeguarding work, including the single central record, evidence of safeguarding training and leaders' systems for managing information.
- I met with subject leaders responsible for English and mathematics.
- I took account of 97 responses to Parent View, 11 free-text comments from parents and 13 responses to the online staff questionnaire. I also took account of the 13 responses to the online pupil questionnaire and the views of 10 parents whom I met at the start of the school day.