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Mrs Fay Brett
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Brett

Short inspection of Creswick Primary & Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 8 March 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 May 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Since the previous inspection, there have been some significant changes at the school. The school has grown considerably, and this academic year each year group has two classes. Many of the areas for improvement from the previous inspection remain the case.

Over the past year there has been a large number of staffing changes. You are committed to recruiting the very best candidates, but have found recruiting for some positions a challenge. You have taken swift and necessary action to ensure that pupils continue to receive quality and consistency in their education during this time. You acknowledge, and are quickly dealing with, the parental concerns that have been expressed about the staffing turbulence. Senior leaders are teaching in class full time, which means that the pace of school improvement has not been as rapid as it needs to be this year.

You are ably supported by your deputy headteacher and other senior leaders. Many parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, commented on how much they appreciate your positive leadership team and the effectiveness of the school's work. One parent summed up the sentiments of others: 'Creswick school is a well-run school and all the staff are passionate about teaching.'

You place a strong emphasis on the school being a positive, nurturing community, and relationships between adults and pupils are generally strong. Pupils' attendance overall continues to be broadly in line with that nationally. Most pupils who spoke with me told me that they were happy and enjoyed their learning. They work diligently in lessons, and their books show that this is the norm. Nearly all parents agreed that their children are happy and safe.

Children start well at Creswick Primary & Nursery School. For example, children in the Nursery class are provided with older pupils as 'buddies' to help them settle quickly and make friends. School evidence shows that this is proving successful. In 2017, the proportion of children who left Reception achieving a good level of development was above the national average and was an improvement on 2016. Pupils continue to make good progress through key stage 1, particularly in reading and mathematics.

One of the indications of your strong leadership is how you deal with challenges. The many changes of staff have had an impact on how well adults understand and consistently apply the school's behaviour policy. You and governors recognise that the current policy is not precise nor systematic enough. It does not sufficiently indicate the measures adults should use to keep disruption in class to a minimum. Currently, the stages you require in behaviour management to prevent the overuse of fixed-term exclusions are not as clear as they should be. You have already taken a decision to change the nurture provision at the school to improve the effectiveness for older pupils. The effect of your changes is starting to help individual pupils settle more quickly to their work and provide additional support for those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Of the parents who responded to Parent View, 30% expressed concern about changes in the usually strong and consistently high standards of behaviour.

Governors are dedicated to their role in overseeing the quality of education and behaviour at the school. Under the leadership of the new chair of governors, governors have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They are becoming increasingly confident in using the information about pupils' achievement to hold the leadership team more fully to account.

You have an accurate view of the current strengths and weaknesses. You and your leadership team are determined that improvements will be brought about swiftly so that the school remains good at its next inspection.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You take appropriate precautions to ensure that pupils are safe at school. You have established a strong safeguarding culture by training and developing staff and governors in the most up-to-date national safeguarding guidance.

Recording systems are fully in place for the recruitment of staff. Leaders and governors are rigorous in carrying out the necessary checks on staff who work at

the school. Records of these checks are accurately maintained. You are diligent in using advice from the local authority when required to ensure that pupils are kept safe and well.

The vast majority of parents value the high priority staff place on ensuring that their children are safe and well looked after. Pupils have a mature understanding of what bullying is and what it is not. Those spoken with were able to confidently name an adult at school that they would speak to if they had concerns. These pupils were also confident that adults would deal with situations. However, this view was not held by all pupils. A few pupils who responded to their questionnaire lack confidence in adults to deal with situations consistently well.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was to consider whether pupils in key stage 2, particularly those who are most able, were making enough progress in mathematics. Since the previous inspection, the progress pupils have made in key stage 2 has been broadly in line with or below that of other pupils nationally from similar starting points.
- You have made improving the quality of teaching in mathematics a school improvement priority. You are working carefully with advisers from the local authority so that improvements are consistent across the school. The mathematics leader is training staff to ensure that they have the subject knowledge they require to provide learning that is appropriate to the needs of different pupils.
- In upper key stage 2 there is evidence in the work in pupils' books that teachers provide them with a sequence of learning that helps them build their knowledge and practise mathematical skills. In these classes, pupils have opportunities to use and apply their skills in a variety of ways. However, in other year groups, the most able pupils are not consistently provided with sufficient opportunities to use their skills effectively.
- Pupils enjoy mathematics and many told me how much they appreciate their learning activities, especially learning their times tables. Pupils' books show that they are diligent and try their best when completing their activities. However, adults' use of the school's marking and feedback policy varies too much.
- Another line of enquiry I considered was the quality of teaching in phonics. This was because the proportion of pupils who reached the required standard in the Year 1 phonic screening check in 2017 was below that found nationally.
- You had identified the development of the teaching in phonics as part of your school improvement plans for this year. You are involved in a project with the local authority to ensure that the quality of teaching is strengthened and pupils acquire their early reading skills quickly and well.
- You have ensured that effective and additional teaching is in place in Year 2 so that pupils can continue their learning of phonics in these classes. Previously, the proportion of pupils who have passed their phonics screening check in Year 2 has been in line with the national average. You are confident and evidence supports

that pupils who did not pass their screening check in Year 1, will be successful this year.

- The quality of phonics teaching in Year 1 is effectively helping pupils gain their skills. Pupils have a very secure knowledge of sounds and many can explain their understanding confidently. For example, one pupil in Year 1 easily and accurately explained her understanding of sounds and demonstrated how sounds are linked to spelling and writing sentences. Many other pupils were equally as skilled with their explanations.
- I also considered how well leaders cater for the needs of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Leadership of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is strong. Over the past 18 months, the recording and analysing of pupils' achievement has improved through the more effective use of each individual pupil's one-page plan. In early years, leaders and staff are becoming increasingly effective at identifying special educational needs in children and responding swiftly. As leaders, you carefully track and monitor the progress individuals make and carefully plan where some pupils could make even better progress.
- You provide appropriate training for staff so that they are equipped to meet the needs of pupils precisely. This is especially true for those who have a number of vulnerabilities. Pupils with very specific needs are provided with appropriate opportunities and are making good progress over time.
- Where the quality of teaching is stronger over time, the work in disadvantaged pupils' books demonstrates that their needs are met well and resources are effectively used. However, this practice is not consistent. In some classes, adults do not use a range of strategies to teach pupils or provide resources so that pupils can easily learn and practise their skills. Consequently, in these classes, pupils are not settled and ready to learn.
- Governors have identified that the use of additional funds is not as precise as it could be. You are currently considering how best to support pupils in class and alternative ways of using funds to raise the achievement for disadvantaged pupils. It is too soon to assess the impact of these changes.
- My final line of enquiry was to investigate how well pupils attend school and the impact of the high rates of fixed-term exclusions on the quality of behaviour. Fixed-term exclusions in 2015/16 were well above the national average.
- Your work on increasing attendance and reducing persistent absenteeism is starting to bear fruit. You work closely with the attendance office from the local authority and have examples of pupils' improved attendance. You celebrate when pupils attend every day, and 9% of pupils had 100% attendance in 2017.
- Persistent absenteeism is starting to reduce. Through your work with parents and building relationships through the family worker, you provide support and challenge to families where necessary. Over half the pupils who have been persistently absent have improved their attendance as a result of your work.
- Some pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged or those who have SEN and/or disabilities and have specific needs, are not provided with the appropriate

and essential behaviour strategies that help them settle and learn. Fixed-term exclusions are used too often, and as a result these pupils are not making enough progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- review the behaviour management policy and practices, and ensure that all adults use and apply the procedures consistently
- reduce fixed-term exclusions by ensuring that appropriate and timely interventions are in place for pupils who require support
- use additional pupil premium funding more precisely to further raise attendance of disadvantaged pupils and reduce persistent absenteeism
- improve the consistency of teaching in mathematics so that the most able and disadvantaged pupils can excel and individual needs are appropriately met.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher, middle leaders, the school business manager, the chair of governors and two other governors. We visited classes to observe children learning. We evaluated the quality of pupils' achievement by considering work in books across differing abilities in mathematics.

I spoke with pupils informally in classrooms and when walking around the school site during break and lunchtime. I observed pupils as they moved around the school between lessons.

Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, along with the school's record of checks carried out on staff working at the school. I analysed and discussed a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans and documents relating to pupils' behaviour, exclusions and attendance.

I considered 80 responses to Parent View and the comments parents made using the online 'free-text' service. I evaluated 24 staff responses and the pupil responses to their online questionnaire.