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Miss Jill Mason
Headteacher
Castle Primary School
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Dear Miss Mason

Short inspection of Castle Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in December 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. This is to the credit of you, the local governing body and the staff, who have continued to drive the school forward through changes in staffing, leadership and the school's conversion to academy status.

You were appointed on 1 September 2014. The school became part of Congleton multi-academy trust on 1 March 2015. Your vision is to create a school where pupils respect each other and develop a love of learning. This vision is brought to life by the rich curriculum and the creativity and commitment of the staff. Pupils' positive attitudes to learning are a testimony to your success. They talk about their enjoyment of a wide range of subjects, including art, computer programming, science and physical education. They say that teachers 'make learning real'. Parents and carers agree. They are overwhelmingly positive. They hold you and the staff in high regard. This comment, from a parent, is typical of many: 'Knowing that our children are in an environment that is caring and supportive, as well as ambitious for academic achievement, means a great deal to us.'

At the previous inspection leaders were asked to increase the proportion of pupils reaching higher levels in mathematics in key stage 1. You have relentlessly focused on this. You have changed the way that mathematics is taught to ensure that pupils have frequent opportunities to reason mathematically and apply their knowledge to practical problems. Pupils say that they 'love maths because it is active and is about real life'. In 2017, the proportion of pupils reaching higher levels in mathematics by the end of key stage 1 was well above the national average.

The previous inspection also urged you to make sure that teachers have opportunities to share and learn from good practice within and beyond the school. You have worked hard to make sure that staff within the school have opportunities to do this. Staff meet to discuss their practice and share judgements on pupils' work. However, opportunities to share practice and learn from other primary schools are limited. As a result, you have been working largely on your own.

Governors have a comprehensive picture of the school's strengths and the areas that need further development. They successfully help to set and model the school's core values and vision. They are ambitious for the school to improve even further.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You ensure that a strong safeguarding culture is at the heart of the school. This includes planned sessions when external visitors talk to pupils about keeping safe. Pupils demonstrate a good awareness of online safety and the risks associated with texting. They say that they learn from the talks given by local police officers. Pupils' comments include, 'We learn not to be afraid to speak out because everyone has a right to feel safe and protected.'

Staff training is up to date and records are frequently checked. Staff, including non-teaching staff, are fully aware of what to do if they have any concerns. Everyone in school is committed to providing the right level of early help for families to ensure that pupils are safe and protect their well-being. You know all pupils well and you have built strong, trusting relationships with families.

Your records show that pupils' attendance has improved when compared to the same period last year. It is currently above the national average for primary schools. You are very aware that some groups of pupils and their families require more intensive support. You are taking effective actions to address this.

Inspection findings

- A key focus of this inspection was to confirm whether pupils, from different starting points, are making the best possible progress in reading and mathematics across key stage 2.
- Improving pupils' progress in key stage 2 has been, and remains, your top priority. You have taken a range of actions to address this. You have reorganised teaching so that teachers teach according to their subject specialisms. Pupils are taught in mixed-age classes within each key stage. Your checks on the quality of teaching and learning focus closely on pupils' prior attainment. This helps you to keep a close eye on pupils' progress, from all prior attainment groups. Your records show that pupils are making good and sometimes rapid progress in all subjects in key stage 2.
- Work in pupils' mathematics books show that they are routinely expected to return to their work, correct any errors and consolidate mathematical understanding where needed. Pupils have frequent opportunities to use and apply their

mathematical knowledge and skills in new situations. For example, during the inspection, key stage 2 pupils were using mathematics to plan a journey involving complicated flight arrangements and financial decisions. Pupils were challenged to think deeply and master their mathematical knowledge and skills.

- Your work to increase pupils' progress in reading in key stage 2 has had a positive impact. The specialist teaching means that staff teach across key stage 1 and 2. As a result, they know pupils extremely well. The flexible use of mixed-aged teaching groups ensures that less-confident readers receive tailored support and more-able readers are challenged sufficiently. Pupils enjoy sharing challenging class reading books, such as 'The Invention of Hugo Cabret'. They are confident and eager to discuss favourite authors and books. Pupils have opportunities to use and apply their reading skills in different subjects. Your records show that pupils make at least good progress across key stage 2. In 2017, at the end of key stage 2, the proportion of pupils who achieved greater depth in their reading was in line with the national average.
- Finally, we evaluated pupils' progress in writing, particularly spelling, punctuation and grammar. These are priorities on your school development plan. You have organised staff training to improve the teaching of phonics and spelling. You are currently monitoring the impact of this. You agree that teachers' routine expectations of pupils' presentation, handwriting and spelling vary across classes and subjects. You continue to work on these areas.
- During the course of the inspection, it became apparent that staff lack the opportunity to share and learn from practice in other primary schools. You are committed to daily teaching and other senior leaders have full teaching timetables. This further reduces possibilities for staff to learn from good practice that exists within the school. You and the local governing body know that this situation limits your ability to keep staff outward-looking and improve the quality of teaching further.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff have opportunities to share practice and learn from good and outstanding teaching in other primary schools
- all teachers have consistently high expectations for pupils' spelling, handwriting and presentation.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing body, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Marilyn Mottram
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders. I also met with the chair of the local governing body, two other governors and the chief executive officer of Congleton multi-academy trust. I spoke to parents at the beginning of the day and took account of 42 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also considered 39 responses by parents to Ofsted's free-text service. I visited all classes jointly with you. We looked at examples of pupils' work and we talked to pupils about their learning. I spoke informally with pupils at different points during the school day and met with a group of pupils formally. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's own self-evaluation of its performance, the school development plan and documents related to keeping pupils safe. I also looked at information relating to pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour.