

27 June 2018

Ms Shelley Jones  
de Vere Primary School  
Kirby Hall Road  
Castle Hedingham  
Halstead  
Essex  
CO9 3EA

Dear Ms Jones

### **Short inspection of de Vere Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 7 June 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 September 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.**

You, your leaders and governors are now aware of the need for improvements in the school and have plans and support in place which is beginning to have a positive effect. However, improvements have not been rapid enough and leaders' and governors' assessment of some areas of the work of the school have been over-generous.

The previous inspection identified mathematics as an area for development as pupils made less progress in mathematics than in reading. This remains the case. In 2017 pupils' progress between key stage 1 and key stage 2 in mathematics was well below that of pupils nationally. In 2015 and 2016, pupils also made less progress than pupils nationally in mathematics. Pupils' attainment was also below the national average in mathematics at key stage 2, which along with reading attainment, contributed to the attainment of reading, writing and mathematics combined being lower than the national average. Also, at key stage 1, a lower proportion of pupils than nationally achieved the expected standard. Therefore, despite some recent actions to improve progress in mathematics, you recognise that mathematics still requires improvement.

You have created a warm and welcoming school. Staff know pupils and their families well. The majority of parents who spoke to me and who responded to

Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were generally positive and say their children are happy at the school. In 2017, disadvantaged pupils were also well supported. They achieved well, making at least as much progress as all pupils nationally and attaining broadly in line with other pupils nationally in all subjects as a result.

Pupils enjoy opportunities that enrich their learning, such as a residential outdoor-pursuits trip and a visit to the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. They participate in a range of sports and clubs, such as football, gymnastics, fitness, dance and cookery. During the inspection, pupils behaved well in their lessons, and were well mannered. They take pride in contributing to the school community and exercising democratic choices. Some pupils talked about their responsibilities as school councillors, junior librarians, eco-councillors and play leaders.

Pupils achieve well in science and say that they find science interesting and that they enjoy experiments. During the inspection a class of Year 1 pupils were excited to solve the mystery of a lost teddy bear by conducting a series of short tests based on using the five senses. The answers to the tests offered them clues.

Your practice in early years, cited as a strength in the previous inspection report, remains good. Children enter with skills that are broadly average for their age and many leave able to do more than is generally expected. Teachers provide children with a range of interesting activities that often arise from the children's own interests. Children develop their language skills well. For example, during the inspection children took part in high-quality discussion while playing the roles of a doctor and hospital receptionist. They had conversations with patients, discussing parts of the body of a doll and the bad arm of the teacher who took part in the role-play as a patient. Children made notes about the patients and wrote up an appointments sheet. Other children discussed the smells of different ingredients that they used to make perfumes. They also talked about their morning visit to the woods looking at mini-beasts and making art from leaves.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You ensure that the necessary checks are made on staff prior to them taking up appointments. Staff and governors undertake regular and relevant training. Any concerns about pupils are raised immediately and all staff are aware of how to monitor changes in pupils' behaviour. You hold weekly meetings to share any concerns regarding pupils in order to ensure that nothing is overlooked. Where there has been the need, staff have worked with other professionals, such as health and family support, to make sure that pupils are safe and well supported. You and your governors have maintained checks on all aspects of health and safety and assess risks regularly. You are implementing refinements, some of which were suggested by a recent external review of your processes.

Pupils report feeling safe in your school and say that bullying is dealt with when it occurs. They have a good awareness of when they may be at risk and how to

manage this effectively in a range of situations, including when using the internet. Pupils know who to speak to if they are concerned. Year 6 pupils are particularly proud that they undertake a first-aider course. Parents who responded to Parent View agreed that their children are safe at school.

## **Inspection findings**

- My first line of enquiry was around the actions that leaders have taken to improve pupils' progress in mathematics. The previous inspection report found that pupils needed more opportunities to use their basic skills to investigate issues and solve problems throughout the school. The mathematics leader has developed teaching and learning across the school and has provided resources which support teachers to plan lessons that better develop pupils' mathematical reasoning and problem-solving. Leaders have also introduced a new teaching programme aimed at developing reasoning skills. You have also introduced a school-wide focus on accelerating learning of times tables, which pupils said they find fun and motivational.
- Staff have training and receive guidance on how to implement new approaches in their planning. Evidence from pupils' books shows that pupils now have more opportunities to develop their problem-solving and reasoning skills, particularly in key stage 1. However, lessons are not always planned so that pupils are moved on to more challenging tasks early enough and therefore time is wasted repeating exercises which they can already do. As a result, sometimes pupils do not get on to the more demanding reasoning and application tasks. Teachers do not always use assessment information well enough to ensure that pupils at all levels are challenged as much as they can be. Assessment information in key stage 2 is less detailed than that available for key stage 1.
- In some lessons, teachers' explanations were not as clear as they could be and mathematical vocabulary was not always explored. As a result, pupils sometimes find it difficult to explain what they have done or need to do.
- The previous inspection report also talked of the need for pupils to be able to make more decisions independently. Pupils are not always encouraged to think about and discuss what methods they can use to approach problems or to consider the variety of methods that they could use and how to make choices. Therefore, pupils sometimes waste time using methods that are less efficient than others that they know. Work in books is not always well presented, although this has been an area of focus and has improved recently.
- My second line of enquiry was about the actions taken by leaders to improve outcomes and progress in reading. At the end of key stage 2 in 2017, pupils attained less well in reading than pupils nationally and made less progress between key stages 1 and 2 than pupils nationally. Reading attainment was also below the national average for the proportion of pupils who met the expected standard at key stage 1 in 2017. However, the proportion of Year 1 pupils achieving the expected score in their phonics screening was greater than the proportion found nationally. Therefore, this is also an area of focus in your school improvement planning.

- Leaders have implemented a new approach to reading in order to make teaching more focused on developing pupils' comprehension skills. Assessment information provided suggests that this is having a positive impact on pupils' ability to score well in practice tests. The school has also introduced dedicated time within lessons for pupils to read books alone and a programme whereby pupils move up through levels of books as short tests show improvements in their comprehension. The reading leader believes that this programme has led to a significant number of pupils making accelerated progress in their reading. Pupils say that they enjoy undertaking the quizzes which form part of this programme. Topic guidance currently offers teachers a list of books that are suggested for possible use alongside the topic. There is no suggestion of how the books might be taught or what the reading outcomes from this would be.
- Most pupils said that they enjoy reading and read regularly. They make good use of their phonics skills to read unfamiliar words. A minority of pupils choose books which are not appropriate to their level of reading. In a number of cases, home-school reading diaries were missing or very inconsistently completed. While leaders have made attempts to engage parents in reading with their children, there is still scope for more consistent engagement. It is not clear how pupils are supported where it is difficult for parents to undertake this role.
- Leaders are now aware of the inconsistencies in teaching, although their monitoring of the quality of teaching has not always been sufficiently rigorous. Teachers have been offered informal opportunities to improve their practice. The impact of this support now needs to be more systematically assessed.
- My final line of enquiry was to consider whether lower-attaining pupils are supported well. This was because in 2017 lower-prior-attaining pupils did not make as much progress as other pupils nationally between key stages 1 and 2 in any subject. In 2017 a significant number of this group were pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Teachers plan work for lower-ability pupils and the school has invested considerably over the past year in resources that support this group, particularly physical resources to aid the development of understanding in mathematics. This is having a positive effect.
- Learning support assistants know pupils' needs and offer effective support in class, enabling supported pupils to learn well in lessons. Leaders are able to evidence that these pupils are now being carefully and regularly monitored so that specific support is put in place when they begin to fall behind. This is helping a significant number to catch up with other pupils. Evidence in lessons and books, as well as the schools' own assessment information, suggests that this group of pupils are generally making as much progress as others.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- Teaching consistency and quality improve by:
  - giving teachers targeted support and systematically monitoring impact
  - implementing assessment systems used in key stage 1 into key stage 2

- making better use of assessment information in planning lessons.
- Progress and attainment in mathematics improve by:
  - planning lessons so that pupils do not waste time doing work they can already do, so that they move quickly to more challenging tasks
  - discussing mathematical vocabulary and insisting upon its use.
- Progress in reading is accelerated by:
  - identifying quality texts to support topics and offering guidance for teachers regarding their use
  - checking that pupils' choice of reading is appropriate to their needs
  - engaging more with parents to make home-school reading more consistent and considering alternative ways to support pupils' wider reading.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Sutton  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, senior and middle leaders, parents, governors and pupils.

I visited all the classrooms, looked at pupils' work and observed behaviour around the school and listened to pupils read.

I reviewed a number of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement planning, the single central record of employment checks, health and safety information, child protection systems, attendance information and pupil assessment and progress information.

I took account of the 33 responses by parents and 14 responses by staff to Ofsted's online questionnaires as well as 34 comments from parents by text.