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17 October 2018

Mrs Alison Richards
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Richards

Short inspection of Hertingfordbury Cowper Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 3 October 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 October 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Hertingfordbury Cowper is a warm and friendly school. Strong values and the school vision, 'Aim high, build confidence and love learning', are enshrined within all aspects of school life. Pupils are confident and resilient learners, who are well prepared for the next steps in education. Pupils love coming to school. They enjoy the interesting learning activities that teachers plan for them. Those I spoke to were eager to talk about their wide and varied learning opportunities. One pupil commented, 'Teachers make it interesting so we learn better, they make it fun!' They also spoke enthusiastically about visits and visitors who enrich their learning experiences. They particularly enjoy the opportunities they have to engage in sporting and musical activities.

Across the school, you have ensured that high-quality teaching meets the needs of all groups of learners. Consequently, pupils make good progress and achieve well. Standards at the end of key stages 1 and 2 have been above national averages for three consecutive years.

Warm relationships between pupils and their teachers underpin their highly positive attitudes to learning. Pupils work very well together. They are very polite and well mannered. They are articulate and confident when engaging with adults. Pupils behave exceptionally well, both in lessons and around the school. At the time of the last inspection, behaviour was judged to be outstanding and this remains the case.

Parents' views are highly positive. Those I spoke with and those who responded to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, were fulsome in their praise of all aspects of school life. One parent, whose comment was typical of others received, said: 'This is a happy, caring school which provides a variety of opportunities for my child to grow and develop. Mrs Richards is a strong leader who is respected by us all.'

All staff who responded to Ofsted's staff survey said that they enjoy working at the school and are proud to do so. They all, rightly, agree that the school is well led and managed. Teachers are appreciative of the way that leaders support them and the importance that is placed on their well-being. They value the opportunities for professional development that are provided for them. There is a strong learning culture among staff.

Governors share the staff's confidence in your leadership. Governors are committed and ambitious for the school. They work strategically and focus their monitoring activities appropriately. This means that they have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement.

The previous inspection asked the school to increase the robustness and rigour of its self-evaluation processes. This has been fully addressed. You, your leadership team and governors have an accurate knowledge of the school's strengths and the areas that need to improve to make it even better. The effective actions that have been taken to date have ensured that the school has gone from strength to strength. For example, there has been a focus on developing more effective questioning, improving writing and developing more opportunities for pupils to reason and problem-solve in mathematics. You know that there is work to be done to ensure that the impact of these actions is sustained. The school improvement plan clearly shows that you have identified the right actions to ensure that this is the case. Accurate self-evaluation is ensuring that the school has good capacity for further improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that arrangements for safeguarding are fit for purpose. All staff receive appropriate training and consequently know how to keep pupils safe. Leaders also provide regular weekly safeguarding questions for staff to consider and provide training for all school volunteers.

Pupils I spoke with said that they feel safe in school. They view school as a very happy place and are confident that any incidents of unkindness will be dealt with swiftly by adults.

Parents agree that their children are safe in school and well cared for. Pupils understand about keeping themselves safe because staff teach them how to do so, including when working online. You also provide valuable information to parents about this.

Appropriate pre-employment checks are made to ensure that all adults are suitable to work with children. You keep detailed records of any concerns relating to pupils' welfare and take appropriate action to support pupils when appropriate.

Inspection findings

- To determine whether the school remained good, I pursued three lines of enquiry in addition to safeguarding. I first reviewed what the school does to ensure that all pupils attend regularly. This was because attendance had been flagged as a concern within historical performance information.
- Attendance of all pupils is closely monitored. The school follows up on all absence on the first day it occurs. The importance of regular attendance is communicated clearly and regularly to parents through newsletters. You challenge and help parents to improve their children's attendance. Where pupils have been persistently absent, this is largely due to medical issues. Attendance for the whole of last year was above average for all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged. Current attendance this term is in line with that seen nationally.
- I next considered the curriculum. I wanted to explore how well this supports all pupils to make good progress in all subjects. You and all the staff are determined to ensure that your curriculum is engaging and inspires learning. Creative links between subjects, such as science, history and geography, through topics ensure that there are opportunities for pupils to learn at greater depth and develop a secure understanding of different areas of learning. You continuously check the impact of curriculum planning on pupils' learning and understanding. Your school improvement plan accurately identifies actions to improve this still further.
- For example, we saw that Year 5 pupils were developing an excellent understanding of the solar system as a result of an engaging, interactive lesson. Pupils had drawn the orbits of different planets in the playground. The use of different-sized fruits helped pupils to gain an understanding of the relative size of planets and they were able to order planets in terms of their distance from the sun.
- Topics also provide realistic purposes for writing, which support the development of literacy skills. For example, we saw that Year 2 pupils, who had been learning about the Great Fire of London, had written impressive newspaper reports about this. Year 4 pupils had written accurately and at length within their science learning about the digestive system.
- Learning experiences are enhanced through a wide range of enrichment activities. These include residential visits for all key stage 2 pupils, as well as visits and visitors. Pupils benefit from 'forest school learning' and the opportunity to learn to swim in the school's own pool. Music is a strength of the school and many pupils are involved in the orchestra. Pupils also have the opportunity to

learn the recorder and to play steel drums.

- The additional sports funding is used well and pupils enjoy the opportunities they have to participate in competitive sport as well as the many sporting clubs that are provided.
- My last line of enquiry centred on leadership and management. I wanted to determine how well placed the school was to sustain existing improvements.
- Leaders and governors have a shared vision. You have strengthened and developed leadership at all levels, through appropriate and effective training. This is ensuring that all subject leaders are able to check and champion their subjects effectively. The achievement of awards, such as the gold Primary Science Quality Mark and the gold School Games Mark, reflects the effectiveness of leadership in these subject areas. This greater distribution of leadership is building good capacity for sustained improvement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the priorities that are identified in the school development plan are fully implemented, in order to sustain and build upon the developments made to date in English, mathematics and the wider curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Joan Beale
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held discussions with you and your deputy about the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, the school's self-evaluation of its performance, plans for future improvement and information about current pupils' progress and attainment. Additionally, I met with subject leaders and four governors. I also held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.

I visited all classrooms, accompanied by leaders, to observe teaching, learning and assessment, and looked at the work in pupils' books in a range of subjects.

I met with a group of pupils to talk about their experiences at school and also talked more informally with pupils in lessons and at breaktime. I scrutinised safeguarding policies and practice, including systems for safe recruitment of staff.

I took account of 18 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. I also gathered the views of parents through 154 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 86 responses using the free-text service. Additionally, I spoke with parents when they were collecting their children from school.