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Mrs Juliet Fraser
Headteacher
Christopher Reeves CofE VA Primary School
Hinwick Road
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Dear Mrs Fraser

Short inspection of Christopher Reeves CofE VA Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 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 September 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since your appointment in May 2017, you have been supported well by your staff and the governing body. Teamwork across the school is strong. There is a shared sense of purpose, with priorities identified and tackled quickly. Governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and share your ambitious aims for developing the school further. Together, you have ensured that the transition to a primary school, completed this year, has run smoothly. Pupils are benefiting enormously from recently finished building work which has added a large hall, a music room and a new classroom to facilities.

You have good systems for checking provision so that you can respond quickly if pupils are falling behind in their work. You rightly prioritise developments and have implemented effective strategies to ensure that the school continues to improve. For example, you and your staff have improved pupils' progress in mathematics. As a result of better teaching, attainment in mathematics has risen quickly across the school. You are showing now the same determination to close the gap between attainment in reading and writing. You and your staff embrace new ideas. Initiatives are based on a good understanding of how they will help to improve provision.

Pupils are proud of their school. There is a delightful atmosphere in lessons and on

the playground. Pupils are polite, friendly and articulate. Older pupils enjoy working with the Reception Year class to share books. At playtimes, pupils play together happily, supporting each other sensitively.

The school focuses well on pupils' social as well as academic development. Pupils say that they are well cared for. They thoroughly enjoy school and are encouraged to take ever-increasing responsibility as they grow older. For example, the school's 'Charity Champions' explain clearly what they are doing to raise funds and why it is important. The school council gives pupils a good voice in the life of the school. Councillors feel that they are listened to and able to contribute effectively to school improvement.

Activities outside lessons help to make learning fun and give pupils opportunities to learn about the world beyond the local community. For example, work with a visiting musical group encouraged pupils to reflect on the cultural diversity they may encounter in later life.

Pupils like the plentiful opportunities they have to work outside in the school's wonderful grounds. They are particularly enthusiastic about the forest school that has been developed since the last inspection, because it enables them to develop teamwork and to learn how to solve real-life problems outside in the natural environment.

Parents are very positive about many aspects of school life. Most feel that teaching is good and that the school has improved quickly since your appointment. They especially like early years provision and the way that it gives their children a good start to school life. As one parent commented, 'I could not have asked for better and my child is so happy and has settled so quickly into school life.'

Safeguarding is effective.

The culture of safeguarding in the school is strong. You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. The governing body has rigorous systems for checking that safeguarding procedures are up to date and effective.

By providing regular training, you ensure that staff, including those new to the school, are fully aware of their roles and responsibility to keep pupils safe. They understand the importance of taking prompt action when they have any concerns about pupils. A good example of this is the way that you responded recently when it appeared that some pupils who had left your school had not transferred to another setting. You followed up this concern quickly with the relevant bodies.

Pupils feel safe in school. As one commented, 'We are like one big family.' Pupils talk confidently about the dangers they may face in their everyday life, including e-safety and how to stay safe when crossing the busy road outside the school.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, I met with you to confirm the lines of enquiry for my day in school.
- The first of these looked at pupils' attainment and progress, including for the most able in key stage 1. I wanted to check this because before the inspection I had no information about how well pupils were doing in key stage 2. This is because until this year you have had no Year 6 pupils. In key stage 1, it was noticeable that in 2017, very few pupils at the end of Year 2 exceeded the expected standard for their age in reading, writing and mathematics.
- I looked at pupils' work as well as school assessment information. This showed that pupils make good progress across the school in reading, writing and mathematics. Work in key stage 2 builds well on pupils' starting points. By the end of Year 5 in 2018, most pupils were working at or beyond their age-related expectations. Across the school, pupils' attainment has, historically been slightly lower in writing than in reading and mathematics. Leaders are doing the right things to tackle this, by, for example, improving the accuracy of assessments, and current progress in writing is good.
- As elsewhere in the school, teaching in Years 1 and 2 provides increasingly good levels of challenge for the most able. Consequently, the proportion working at greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics improved significantly in 2018.
- My second line of enquiry looked at how well the school teaches subjects beyond English and mathematics. I wanted to check that other subjects are being given sufficient priority in your mixed-age classes.
- I found that the curriculum is well planned. Subjects such as art and design and history are taught particularly well. This ensures that pupils make good progress most of the time in subjects beyond English and mathematics. However, while pupils produce some good-quality work in science in Years 5 and 6, this is not the case elsewhere in the school. Planning of the science curriculum is not sufficiently robust to ensure that all aspects are taught in sufficient detail.
- I also looked at how well leadership is shared across the school to ensure that improvement since the last inspection has been secured and maintained. This was a focus because you were appointed just over a year ago and most of your subject leaders are fairly new to their roles.
- You have secured good improvement since the last inspection. For example, pupils' work is now neat and tidy because teachers have raised their expectations of presentation. Pupils' books show that they can now apply their mathematical skills to solve problems or to carry out investigations confidently.
- Your new subject leaders are keen and enthusiastic. They are able to talk confidently about what they are trying to improve and how in English and mathematics. Developments in the last two years in the teaching of mathematics and reading have been based on a good understanding of the principles behind the initiatives and what they are intended to achieve. However, you know that subject leaders need more opportunity to check provision for themselves so that they can play a fuller part in securing the needed improvements to make the school even better.

- My fourth line of enquiry looked at how well teaching meets differing needs in your mixed-age classes.
- My observations in lessons and a scrutiny of pupils' books confirmed that teaching takes good account of different ages or ability groups most of the time. Teachers have good expectations of what pupils should achieve and plan work that builds successfully on their starting points. Teaching assistants make a considerable contribution to supporting pupils' progress, particularly those who occasionally need a little extra help.
- Finally, I looked at pupils' behaviour and how well the school tackles bullying. I looked at this because a comparatively high proportion of parents expressed concern about these aspects of the school's work in the Ofsted questionnaire.
- I found that pupils' behaviour is good. During the inspection, they worked hard in lessons and conducted themselves well at other times. Pupils say that this is typical of behaviour. School records show that the school has good systems for tackling occasional poor behaviour or bullying. Pupils are very confident that should they have a problem in school it would be dealt with quickly.
- You accept that parents' perceptions of behaviour do not reflect the evidence that behaviour is good and that staff manage it well. This is because you have not always been sufficiently explicit about your expectations and how you respond to concerns from parents when they arise.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- work in science is of a consistently high quality across the school
- new subject leaders have sufficient time to carry out their own checks on provision so that they can play a fuller part in securing improvement
- they work with parents to reassure them about the school's strategies for maintaining good behaviour and tackling any occasional bullying.

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 Bedford. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mike Capper
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I made observations of teaching and learning across the school during learning walks with the headteacher. I held meetings with school leaders and members of the governing body. I had discussions with parents at the

start of the school day and scrutinised the 21 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I considered a range of information supplied by the school, including checks on the quality of teaching, the school's development plan, school policies and records relating to attendance and safeguarding procedures. I listened to some pupils reading in lessons, scrutinised pupils' books in different subjects and looked at school assessment information from the current school year.