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Mrs Susan Ball
Headteacher
Cold Ash St. Mark's C of E Primary School
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Dear Mrs Ball

Short inspection of Cold Ash St. Mark's C of E Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Together with the deputy headteacher, other senior leaders and governors, you have led the school to become the happy, purposeful place that it is today. Adults and pupils alike care for each other, showing respect and kindness. You are ambitious for pupils to achieve well and to make good progress academically, but you also place a strong emphasis on developing pupils' characters and their sense of responsibility.

Senior leaders have a clear view of the strengths and areas for development in the school. Plans to improve the school are detailed and identify the impact that leaders' actions will have on the progress that pupils make. Middle leaders have a clear understanding of their role in improving teaching and learning in their subjects. This tackled one of the areas that inspectors asked you to improve at the previous inspection.

Teachers plan interesting lessons that spark pupils' interest. One pupil in Year 4 showed great pleasure in recalling many of the things that she had learned last academic year. She was able to recall these because staff had planned memorable learning experiences, both in school and on visits to interesting places. Teachers have high expectations of pupils, and pupils, in turn, work hard, striving to do their best.

Pupils achieve well in the school and make good progress, including pupils who

have special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils. The most able pupils make strong progress in key stage 2 and most attain the high standard at the end of key stage 2. This successfully addressed the other area for improvement identified at the previous inspection. However, leaders recognise that they need to have a sharper focus on enabling more pupils of average ability to make the strong progress needed to achieve these higher outcomes by the end of key stage 2, especially in writing and mathematics. They also understand that outcomes in phonics at the end of Year 1 are not as high as they should be.

Pupils thrive on the many opportunities that they have to take responsibility, and this contributes to the school being a warmly inclusive and friendly place for pupils to learn. Older pupils take their role as buddies to the youngest in the school very seriously and this helps the youngest children to settle quickly and feel secure. I saw pupils from Year 6 spending their breaktime playing with much younger children and, in turn, setting an excellent role model for the rest of the pupils to copy.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Many enthused about the way that staff enable pupils not only to achieve well academically, but also socially and emotionally. One said: 'I leave my child at school every morning safe in the knowledge she is getting a great start in education but also is happy and cared for.' This was representative of the views of the parents who expressed their views on Parent View, and also of those I spoke to on the playground at the end of the day.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils are safe in school because leaders have placed the well-being of every child at the heart of the school's work. All adults in the school have a shared understanding of their responsibility to care for pupils. In turn, pupils trust adults to take care of them. One pupil said: 'Everyone means something to their teachers. We all feel special.' Policies and procedures are effective and followed thoroughly. When the need arises, leaders engage with external agencies to safeguard potentially vulnerable pupils.

Governors play an important role in scrutinising all aspects of safeguarding in the school. They ensure that pupils are safe wherever they are in the school and whatever they are doing. Governors also make sure that all the right checks are carried out on everyone who works in the school, so that only suitable people are allowed to work with children.

Pupils learn how to stay safe in a range of situations, including online. They understand how to avoid such dangers as malware when using online technology. Bullying, including cyber bullying, is well understood by pupils, who say that it happens only rarely in school and is quickly nipped in the bud.

Inspection findings

- We agreed to focus on three aspects of the school's work during this inspection. The first of these was to consider the effectiveness of leaders in improving the quality of teaching in the school so that more pupils can achieve the higher standards. Leaders and governors place a high priority on making sure that teaching across the school is effective. Performance management is used well to improve teaching across the school.
- You have a thorough understanding of what comprises effective teaching, and you convey this clearly to the staff. Staff receive appropriate training and professional development opportunities to carry out their work effectively, to address gaps in their knowledge and extend their skills. Teaching assistants who undertake the various interventions receive training so that they are able to deliver these programmes effectively. However, leaders do not systematically check that training for staff has had the desired effect. Occasionally teachers and support staff demonstrate a lack of some subject knowledge, even when they have received appropriate training.
- Governors pay close attention to information about pupils' progress. They use this, together with evidence collected from their various monitoring activities, to hold leaders to account for the quality of teaching in the school.
- Next, we looked closely at how well writing is taught in the school, including phonics. Writing has been a focus of leaders' attention in the last academic year, and remains so this year.
- In recent years, pupils have not made the strong progress in writing that they have made in reading and mathematics. Pupils currently in the school are making good progress in writing. In particular, outcomes at the end of key stage 1 improved sharply in 2018, having dipped the previous year.
- Pupils enjoy writing because teachers plan lessons that capture pupils' interests. Teachers draw ideas for writing from books that appeal to pupils in their class. For example, Year 6 were writing diary entries from the book 'There's a Boy in the Girls' Bathroom' by Louis Sachar. Pupils were very proud of their work and could explain how they had improved it as a result of the helpful guidance and advice received from staff.
- Outcomes in phonics have been variable in recent years. In 2018, the number of pupils who achieved the expected standard by the end of Year 1 dipped again and was below that seen nationally in recent years. This followed a sharp improvement in 2017. Staff have received training in phonics, but some gaps in subject knowledge still exist and prevent pupils from achieving as well as they should. By the end of Year 2, almost all pupils have achieved the expected standard.
- Finally, we looked at how well the wider curriculum meets the needs of all pupils and enables them to achieve well in a range of subjects. The curriculum is broad and interesting, providing many memorable experiences for pupils, and enabling them to achieve well. You rightly point to particular strengths in physical education and sports, as well as in art and music.
- There are many clubs and activities outside of the school day for pupils to enjoy.

These include cooking, judo, and several sports clubs. Pupils spoke with great pride about representing the school in a range of sports events such as cross country, football and netball. Pupils also benefit from opportunities to visit the theatre and to perform to audiences in musical productions.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well catered for in the curriculum. Pupils have a strongly developed sense of right and wrong, and understand how important it is to be kind and welcoming to everyone. Pupils understand that physical appearances are only skin deep. They explain clearly that pupils new to the school who look different or who come from different backgrounds would find the same warm welcome that everyone receives.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of phonics is strengthened so that the proportion of pupils reaching the required standards in phonics at the end of Year 1 consistently matches or exceeds national figures
- teaching enables more pupils, especially those of middle ability, to achieve the higher standards by the end of key stage 2, particularly in writing and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Bruce Waelend
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and other leaders, including the deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, and the leader of English to discuss various aspects of the school's work. I met with a group of staff, which comprised teachers and teaching assistants, to discuss various aspects of their work. I also had meetings with three members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local diocese.

Together, we visited all classes to observe teaching and learning, to talk to pupils and to look at their work. The deputy headteacher joined us on some of these visits. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school, including during playtime. I

also held a meeting with 10 pupils drawn from Years 2 to 6, and discussed their writing with them.

I considered 18 responses to the staff survey, 26 responses to the pupil survey and 31 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as speaking to several parents on the playground at the end of the day. A range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation documents, school improvement plans, and safeguarding policies, procedures and checks, were also taken into account.