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Miss Rebecca Nicholson
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Dear Miss Nicholson

Short inspection of Meopham Community Academy

Following my visit to the school on 16 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.

You, senior leaders and governors, along with members of the recently joined multi-academy trust, have a shared vision for pupils to thrive. Collectively, you know the school well and demonstrate increasingly high expectations and a strong determination to help all pupils achieve their potential. Leaders have the confidence of parents, carers and the wider community to continue leading the school forward. The majority of staff are proud to be part of an effective team and enjoy working at the school.

The previous inspection recognised strengths in leadership, teaching, pupils' achievements, the early years and behaviour. These strengths have been maintained. However, pupils' achievement in writing was highlighted as an aspect to be improved in the previous inspection. Staff have been given additional training in this subject and now work closely with other local schools. Staff know pupils' achievements well. Pupils who are in danger of falling behind are identified promptly and given helpful support to catch up. Leaders have revised the school's policy for providing guidance to pupils so that they now use a range of strategies independently to improve their own writing. Accordingly, pupils are making better progress, and more pupils are achieving higher standards in writing than in the past. However, there is still additional work to be done to ensure that progress in writing is consistently strong across the school.

School leaders have effective procedures for school improvement planning, self-evaluation and identifying priorities to improve the school further. Although standards, overall, are above national averages in reading, writing and mathematics, as a team you have recognised the need to strengthen progress further in writing and mathematics. Together with your leadership team and governors, you monitor the implementation of the school improvement plan closely, to ensure that resources are used to raise standards effectively.

Leaders have created a broad curriculum, providing a wide range of first-hand learning experiences that are welcomed by pupils. For example, pupils visit Meopham Windmill when finding out about the local area, and the Museum of Kent Life when learning about the history of toys. Pupils learn about Sikhism when preparing a Langar meal, and Fair Trade when choosing ingredients for smoothies. As one parent noted: 'The school has a holistic approach to my child's education.'

During visits to classrooms, we saw examples of enthusiastic teaching, with pupils given good support to take part in a range of learning activities. For example, in an English lesson, pupils experimented with noun phrases to improve the quality of their own writing. In mathematics, pupils used a range of equipment with a partner, to help them learn about subtraction. The majority of staff question pupils carefully to help them think hard about their work. Pupils benefit from working together and talking about their learning. As a result of strong teaching, most pupils are making good progress. However, some middle-ability and most-able pupils do not attain the higher standards they could in writing and mathematics.

Pupils are cared for well and are known to staff as individuals. Staff work together collaboratively to make sure that individual pupils and their families get support when it is needed. Pupils who have particular needs are encouraged and assisted effectively to take part in the school's activities. Pupils speak happily and articulately about their school. They are polite and share their views with confidence. The vast majority of pupils enjoy their time at school and behave well.

Leaders organise a wide range of extra-curricular activities and encourage the pupils to take part. Pupils appreciate activities such as the energetic before-school club, 'wake up Wednesdays', finger knitting, playing the ukulele, dance and drama clubs, and taking part in a wide range of sporting activities. One parent stated: 'My child enjoys being at the school, especially with its diversity of cultural activities and clubs.' These activities support pupils' learning in all subjects and contribute successfully to their personal development. Pupils say that they like being challenged, and would like more work that makes them think deeply.

Safeguarding is effective

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose. Staff know the school's arrangements for reporting a concern about a pupil, as a result of regular safeguarding training. All staff are aware of their responsibility to act promptly to keep pupils safe. Senior leaders ensure that detailed, up-to-date

records are maintained. Leaders work well with outside agencies to provide effective support for pupils and their families when needed. This support is appreciated by the majority of parents.

Pupils learn how to stay safe. Pupils know how to stay safe online and about the importance of not sharing their personal information. They can talk about the school's fire safety procedures and the importance of road safety. Pupils are very happy to talk to staff should they have a concern, and are confident that their problems will be sorted out. Pupils speak very highly of the 'magnolia room', where they can go for help 'if they feel stressed'. Incidents of bullying and racism are rare but, when they do occur, leaders take matters seriously and take appropriate action. Consequently, pupils are safe, and the vast majority of pupils feel safe. There is useful information for parents on the school website, including advice about online safety and help for pupils who have medical needs. The vast majority of staff and parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, are confident that pupils are safe at school.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we agreed to focus on: the progress of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, in writing at key stage 2; how effectively leaders are ensuring most-able girls in key stage 1 attain the higher standards in mathematics; and how effectively pupils make progress in all subjects across the wider curriculum.
- Leaders track pupils' progress carefully and have identified correctly that pupils' progress in writing needs to improve further. Staff build pupils' skills by introducing new styles of writing progressively in a series of lessons. Pupils are given real reasons for writing to help make activities purposeful. For example, pupils wrote an atmospheric description linked to their study of World War I. Pupil premium funding is used effectively in writing to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils. Most teaching assistants work successfully alongside pupils in class, either with individuals or small groups. Pupils are given opportunities to talk about their writing with their classmates and practise skills together. Consequently, pupils enjoy writing and speak confidently about their work. Pupils' progress in writing, including that of disadvantaged pupils, is improving. However, some pupils do not apply their knowledge of punctuation and spelling routinely to attain higher standards in writing, and there are differences in outcomes between classes.
- Leaders have reviewed the teaching of mathematics across the school. New resources have been introduced and there is an increasing focus on deepening pupils' mathematical thinking. Most staff introduce new mathematical ideas effectively and in small steps. Additional problem-solving activities are being provided, and staff encourage pupils to show their 'working out'. Pupils are able to explain and justify their mathematical reasoning with increasing confidence. Many parents appreciate the workshops that are organised and the information provided to help them support their children at home. Pupils' progress in mathematics is improving. Nonetheless, as we discussed, there are variations in expectations between classes. Pupils, both boys and girls, are not challenged

consistently in mathematics.

- Leaders are developing a staged programme to help pupils learn effectively in all subjects across the curriculum. Subjects are linked together in thoughtfully chosen themes and detailed information is available for parents on the school website. Speakers are invited into classrooms and pupils are taken on school visits to help make learning fun, relevant and interesting. For example, pupils benefit from talks by fire officers as part of the project 'London's burning', and from a visit to Horton Kirby as part of their project on rivers. Consequently, pupils' progress in all subjects is becoming stronger. Pupils are increasingly able to apply their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more pupils are challenged consistently to attain the higher standards of which they are capable in writing and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Rosemary Addison
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders, two members of the governing body, and two representatives of the multi-academy trust. I also met a group of pupils from Years 1 to 6. You and senior leaders accompanied me on visits to classrooms in all key stages, where I observed learning, spoke to pupils and looked at their work. A range of mathematics and English books were reviewed with you and senior leaders. I observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms and around the school. I took account of 237 parental responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 46 free-text comments. I took account of 30 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and 195 responses to the pupil questionnaire. A range of documentation was scrutinised, including: the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan; information on the school's website; safety records; minutes of meetings; various policies; and information about pupils' progress.