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Ms Karen Healey
Principal
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Dear Ms Healey

Short inspection of Heyford Park Free School

Following my visit to the school on 21 November 2018 with Rosemarie McCarthy, Ofsted Inspector, 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 April 2015.

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 and the head of the primary phase have worked with determination to establish high expectations and aspirations for all at the school. Your compelling vision is welcomed by staff, who share your ambition for the school.

Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes. Governors acted swiftly in 2016 when they recognised concerns with school leadership and pupils' progress. Since then, there has been a high turnover of staff, including in the leadership team, and you joined the school in January 2017. You have an accurate understanding of the strengths of the school and the priorities for improvement. You have put in place well-considered actions to address the issues that you found when you joined the school. These have already improved the curriculum, the overall quality of teaching and the way that staff manage pupils' behaviour. However, you are acutely aware of the need to continue these improvements to ensure that they are embedded consistently throughout the school.

Most pupils and parents and carers are happy with Heyford Park. Pupils like the strong relationships that staff have built up with them. Sixth-form students value their tutorials that help to promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. Many parents commented on the caring support from staff that

creates what one parent described as a 'positive, nurturing environment.' However, a minority of parents raised concerns about pupils' behaviour. Inspectors observed polite, engaged pupils in lessons and around the school. Staff management of pupils' behaviour is an aspect of school life that you have addressed well, refining the school's behaviour policy so that it is clear and coherent. You recognise the need to ensure that all staff apply the policy and associated strategies consistently across the school.

A small number of parents also expressed concerns about the impact of the staffing difficulties on pupils' progress. You are working hard to ensure that the quality of teaching is consistently strong throughout the school. Staff we spoke with, and those who responded to the staff survey, welcome the professional development programme that has helped them to develop their practice. They share your vision and determination for school improvement. However, there is still work to be done to strengthen teaching, so that all pupils make strong progress and catch up from previously poor provision, especially in mathematics.

Before you joined the school, leaders responded well to the need to improve the provision for early years, as identified in the previous inspection report. The quality of provision and rates of progress in Reception Year are greatly improved and children now make strong starts to their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Arrangements for the recruitment of staff follow guidelines. Statutory checks are completed and recorded carefully. Staff training is up to date. Staff are alert to the slightest worry and understand the steps to take to record and report any concern. Risk assessments are thoughtful and thorough, and you manage the challenges of the school site well.

Pupils feel safe and say that there is always someone who will make time for them and listen if they need to share any worries. They are adamant that there is very little bullying, but say that staff deal well with any 'mean' behaviour. They are proud that they are part of an all-through school where everyone looks out for each other. Pupils highlighted the sixth-form students' mentoring of lower school pupils as a particularly successful aspect of school life.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, inspectors considered the steps that leaders have taken to improve the provision for Reception Year children. I found a bright and well-organised provision that supports children well to have a good start to their learning. Leaders have transformed the structure and approach of this aspect of the school. They make good use of visits to family homes and pre-schools to ensure that all staff know children really well before they join. Leaders also work exceptionally well with parents by offering events including 'curriculum evenings' where they help parents to support their child's learning. This has helped to

improve communication between staff and families and means that staff know when a child needs more time to secure their learning or is ready to be moved on. Children's books show that they make strong progress with their writing and communication. Parents are highly positive about this aspect of the school, with many writing about the 'really caring' staff.

- Inspectors also considered leaders' actions to improve the quality of teaching and the progress of pupils in mathematics. This has been an area of concern to leaders for some time and staffing problems have hindered improvement. The provisional 2018 GCSE examination results indicate that pupils underperformed in mathematics. Inspectors found that, over time, pupils are developing their numeracy skills, but many are not making enough progress to catch up from previously weak provision. Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes in their mathematics lessons but sometimes work is too easy for them because it does not take into account what they can already do.
- The curriculum is not explained as clearly as it should be on the school's website, so inspectors considered how well you have designed and implemented the curriculum. You have a clear vision for the school and know how you want the curriculum to support pupils' learning so that it prepares them well for their next steps and life in modern Britain. Pupils have a broad and balanced curriculum overall and statutory requirements are met. Leaders make the most of the school's location and pupils enjoy the wide range of exciting activities and special study days. Assemblies and tutorials promote pupils' SMSC development well. The new behaviour policy, shaped round the mantra, 'ready, respectful, kind and safe' is designed to support pupils' learning beyond the academic, but is not yet consistently applied by all staff.
- Governors are aspirational and share your ambitious vision for the school. They identified issues in 2016 and took swift action, as advised by external experts. They have provided you and the other new leaders with strong support and challenge as you have improved the school over the past two years. Their minutes show that they hold you to account well and interrogate information to ensure that it is accurate. However, perhaps due to the recent challenges, they have become too involved in operational activities whereas their role should be more strategic.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the improvements to the quality of teaching, especially in mathematics, are embedded and continued, so that pupils make strong progress and catch up from previously weak provision
- all staff apply the new behaviour policy consistently, so that it supports pupils' learning
- governors develop their strategic approach to school improvement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools

commissioner and the director of children's services for Oxfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lucy English
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, the head of primary phase and other senior and middle leaders. The lead inspector met with three governors who are also trustees, including the chair of the governing body, who is also the chair of members at The Heyfordian School Trust, the single-academy trust responsible for the school. Inspectors visited classes across the school to observe pupils' learning, and speak with them and look in their books. I also met with a group of pupils formally and considered 17 responses to the online pupil survey. My colleague spoke with pupils informally during break- and lunchtime. She also met with parents at the start of the school day and we considered 94 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 57 written contributions by parents. We spoke with staff during the day and took account of 41 responses to the online staff questionnaire. My colleague examined a range of pupils' mathematics work with leaders. I looked at a range of documentation, including information about the work of governors, safeguarding, behaviour and the curriculum. Additionally, we scrutinised and discussed the school's self-evaluation and development plans.