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Dear Miss Bassett

Short inspection of Ely St John's Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 29 November 2018 with Paul Brooker, HMI, 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 February 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

Ely St John's Community Primary School is a calm, caring and creative environment in which positive relationships promote pupils' progress well. Classrooms are attractive places in which to learn, and pupils often point proudly to their work that is on display. Staff plan engaging activities and have high expectations for pupils' success in them and, as a result, pupils get down to work quickly and with enthusiasm. Pupils know what it is that they need to do because teachers make their 'non-negotiables' – the criteria for success in each task – very clear at the outset. Teachers help pupils to understand how to improve their work and give them the chance to make the necessary corrections or changes. This helps to develop pupils' resilience and their ability to learn from mistakes rather than be discouraged by them.

Outside of the classroom, pupils participate in the exceptionally rich range of musical, sporting and cultural activities that are open to them. Very many pupils play a musical instrument, including within the school's 38-piece orchestra and the brass ensemble, which recently performed to an audience during a visit by Prince Charles to Ely. Others take part in dramatic productions, inter-school sporting competitions or they help to grow vegetables on the allotment. Pupils are encouraged to take risks under adult supervision, such as when gardening, making a den in the spinney, or lighting a bonfire and putting it out again. This helps them to develop the ability to keep themselves safe both at, and outside of, school. Many

pupils also take on positions of responsibility, such as those who serve as playground activity leaders (PALs). These roles promote pupils' personal development and the cohesiveness of the school community.

Staff ensure that pupils behave very well both in the classroom and around the school's large and attractive site. A very high proportion of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree that the school ensures that pupils are well behaved. In 2016–17, the proportion of pupils who were temporarily excluded from school was above the national average. Leaders have made changes to the school's behaviour policy. These focus on encouraging positive conduct and are ensuring that those who have difficulty in managing their behaviour are supported to improve it. Leaders have created areas within school, such as the sensory room, that are welcoming and therapeutic spaces for such pupils. As a result, there are few serious incidents of misbehaviour, and the school has had little need to use the sanction of exclusion. Attendance is high and very few pupils are persistently absent from school.

Many parents commented positively about the support that staff provide, including for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). As one parent put it, 'The school is warm, friendly and inclusive, and this is bringing out the best in my children.' Pupils who spoke with us made it clear that teachers help them to learn new things, and to broaden and deepen their understanding. As one pupil put it, 'The best thing about this school is the teachers, and the learning.' As a result, most pupils make good progress and achieve well at the end of Reception and key stage 1, in the phonics screening check and in the national tests at the end of Year 6.

Together with other leaders, including governors, you are rigorous in checking the quality of the school's work and relentless in pursuit of improvement. Pupils' learning in science, for example, is preparing them well for the next stage in their education because of the recent changes that leaders have made. These are ensuring that pupils are developing the ability to make a hypothesis, test it, and draw appropriate conclusions from the results of an experiment. In mathematics, teachers have ensured that pupils in both key stage 1 and key stage 2 develop their reasoning skills and regularly apply their knowledge to real-world problems.

Governors share your commitment to provide the best education and the fullest possible range of opportunities for pupils. They provide you with support and ask searching questions. Governors also develop their own ways to gain information about standards in aspects of the school's work. These included the detailed annual safeguarding audit and the survey of health and behaviour that pupils complete. These, together with regular visits, develop governors' understanding of the quality of provision at the school and hold leaders to account well. This work helps to promote improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Staff, parents and pupils are rightly confident that pupils are well looked after. Leaders, including the expert safeguarding governor, have helped to create a culture in which all staff take responsibility for pupils' welfare. You ensure that timely and appropriate action is taken in response to concerns about a pupil's well-being. Leaders are aware of local risks that might cause a danger to pupils, and they ensure that the curriculum educates them about these and other dangers such as cyber-bullying.

Regular training ensures that staff have a good understanding of the risks that pupils face and the procedures to follow. Staff take notice of any changes in a pupil's appearance or behaviour and report any concerns in a timely manner. These are followed up appropriately. Pupils are rarely persistently absent from school, but you ensure that any unexplained absence is followed up promptly. You work tenaciously to ensure that external agencies provide appropriate help for individuals who need it.

Pupils told us that they felt safe at school and that bullying is both rare and usually dealt with effectively by staff. The school's monitoring records support this view. Pupils also made clear that there is always someone that they can talk to if they have a problem, and that they are well supervised during breaktime and lunchtime periods.

Inspection findings

- Our first line of enquiry involved establishing the extent to which key stage 2 pupils make good progress in their writing. In 2017, pupils, including the most able, made too little progress in writing. To tackle this, you have ensured that teachers set individual pupils very clear targets about how to improve their writing. Teachers show pupils what effective writing for different purposes looks like, so that they can see the standard that they are aiming for and can plan their writing accordingly. Teachers and teaching assistants provide ongoing verbal feedback to pupils, in line with the school's policy, that shows them how to improve their initial drafts and that refers back to their individual targets. Pupils take the opportunity to make changes and corrections, which improve the quality of their writing.
- Scrutiny of pupils' work indicates that by Year 6, the most able pupils write fluently and with accuracy for different purposes. Their creative writing is often compelling, with plot, characterisation and pupils' use of descriptive language all serving to engage the reader's interest. Pupils of all abilities are also developing their ability to write at length in subjects other than English. In 2018, by the end of key stage 2, pupils' progress in writing was in line with the national average. Your monitoring information indicates that these improvements are most evident

in upper key stage 2, and that some pupils' extended writing skills are not yet strong enough.

- We also agreed to establish how far teachers enable the most able in both Reception and key stage 1 to complete suitably demanding work. This was an area for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection. Leaders have worked with local authority advisers and other schools to increase the amount of challenge in activities within the early years. Children solve mathematical problems, such as calculating how many chocolate chips they will need when creating different numbers of imaginary ice creams. Teachers ask questions that encourage pupils to explain their reasoning, and to think about alternative ways to solve problems. This encourages pupils to think deeply and builds their resilience.
- In both Reception and key stage 1, teachers direct children at tasks that are appropriately demanding. They take evident enjoyment in these sharply-focused activities, and benefit from one-to-one support with teachers and teaching assistants as they complete them. When writing, pupils use their strong phonics knowledge to sound out words that are new to them and to spell out words of their own choosing when completing sentences. Pupils have ample opportunity to write at length. Teachers check the progress made by the most able regularly and plan tasks carefully so that they help individuals to broaden or deepen their learning.
- Our third line of enquiry involved establishing how far disadvantaged pupils are making good progress from their individual starting points. This is because, over time, the progress of these pupils has been too variable, as has their attainment. Your monitoring information indicates that during the 2017/18 academic year, too few disadvantaged pupils in Years 2 to 4 were working in line with age-related expectations. In the key stage 2 national tests, disadvantaged pupils made similar progress to other pupils in 2017. In 2018, however, some disadvantaged pupils made too little progress.
- You have rightly focused on ensuring that high-quality teaching enables all current pupils to make good progress from their starting points. Disadvantaged pupils' attendance is similar to that of other pupils, which helps them to benefit equally from effective teaching. Additionally, you are monitoring the extent to which individual support plans enable each pupil to make progress. The support provided by these plans particularly benefits disadvantaged pupils who also have SEND. This effective work to identify barriers to learning and help pupils to overcome them also promotes equality of opportunity.
- The school's monitoring information indicates that current disadvantaged pupils are typically making progress at a similar rate to that of others with the same starting points. Our scrutiny of the work in pupils' books confirms this. Over time, the additional support that the school is providing to those who have made too little progress in the past is beginning to help them catch up.
- We also considered the extent to which pupils complete appropriately challenging work, and develop their subject-specific skills, in subjects other than English and mathematics. You are currently reviewing the curriculum within each of these subjects. Inspection evidence supports your judgement that pupils develop their

factual knowledge well across a wide range of subjects. Science and music are particularly strong. Pupils' degree of effort in other subjects is equivalent to that which they devote to their work in English and mathematics.

- However, scrutiny of pupils' work indicates that sometimes the work they complete in other subjects is less challenging than it should be and that pupils' development of subject-specific skills is uneven.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils develop their ability to write well, at length and for a variety of purposes
- in subjects other than English and mathematics, pupils complete work that is appropriately challenging and that develops their subject-specific skills effectively.

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

Yours sincerely

Jason Howard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, other senior and middle leaders, other school staff, governors, local authority representatives and groups of pupils. Together with you and other leaders, we made short visits to a wide range of classes to observe teaching, look at pupils' books and to see pupils at work. We reviewed samples of pupils' work. We evaluated school documents about self-evaluation, development planning and safeguarding, including the single central record and records of child protection. We also considered the 85 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire for parents, alongside responses to the Ofsted staff and pupils' surveys.