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Mr Joseph Piatczanyn
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Dear Mr Piatczanyn

Short inspection of Cranfield Church of England Academy

Following my visit to the school on 11 December 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 October 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Since the last inspection the school has undergone significant change. For example, due to a marked increase in pupil numbers, you have opened a second school site, St Paul's. Additionally, many pupils start part way through the school year. However, leaders and staff have established a strong learning community with very high aspirations for the academic and social success of all pupils. This is because leaders have the necessary knowledge and skills to support change effectively. Governors keep a close eye on developments and serve the school with a wide range of expertise that enables them to support your ambitions well.

Since you became headteacher in April 2018, you and your team have continued to address areas for improvement with determination and success. Your evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for further improvement are precise and accurate. One of the reasons why the school is continuously improving is because you quickly identify what could be better. You regularly consult your parents, pupils and staff about important school issues and carefully consider these views as part of future-planning.

The pupils who spoke to me in lessons were very clear about what they were doing, and

they were thrilled by the exciting topics and activities selected to help them deepen their understanding. Pupils' behaviour is impeccable because they are so fascinated by their lessons. The proportion of your pupils reaching greater depth in writing and the higher standard in reading and mathematics far exceeds the national average, and this has been the case for the last three years. This evidence appears to indicate that the effectiveness of teaching and the impact of school leadership has improved strongly since the previous inspection.

Relationships between parents and staff are extremely positive. Parents report that they feel included in their child's learning and progress. One parent said, 'My child loves school, makes excellent progress and always knows what his next steps are. What a wonderful school!'

Safeguarding is effective.

- The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff are vigilant in their approach to safeguarding procedures and securely maintain records. Leaders are tenacious in ensuring the physical and emotional well-being of all pupils. They have created a safe and happy environment in which pupils can learn and develop.
- The school curriculum strongly supports pupils' safety. Pupils told me that they feel very safe in school and that they are clear about what to do and who to speak to if they have any concerns. The Cranfield 'Helping Hand' is a familiar and useful reminder for pupils. Parents report that they have a high degree of confidence in school staff to protect their children from harm.

Inspection findings

- This inspection's first enquiry focused on how well leaders ensure that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, reach the expected standard in the phonics screening check. Inspection evidence demonstrates that teaching is well planned to meet individual needs and made the important link with reading and writing very clear for pupils. Teachers make phonics sessions lively and fun for pupils. Leaders are meticulous in addressing the needs of pupils who fall behind in the development of their phonics skills. For example, some pupils speak English as an additional language (EAL), which acts as a temporary barrier to their early reading development. However, you identify pertinent and highly effective support which helps pupils to make rapid progress.
- My second enquiry was to check how well the school's curriculum supports all pupils to make rapid progress from their starting points. Inspection evidence shows that you have designed an engaging and effective curriculum. However, you are aware that this will need constant review because of the changing needs of your pupils. You are very committed to implementing 'what is right for Cranfield'. The 'Cranfield Creative Curriculum' you have developed provides a wide range of energising learning experiences which promote pupils' progress. I observed Roman Day in Year 3, during which all pupils were thrilled by a visit from a 'legionary' and asked him incisive questions to increase their knowledge. A Year 4 parent commented, 'My daughter has found the curriculum exciting throughout her time at the school.'

- I looked at how well leaders have tackled the areas for improvement in the previous inspection report. Leaders were asked to accelerate the progress of the most able children in the early years foundation stage by providing them with more challenging activities. You and your staff have embedded highly effective approaches that extend children's knowledge, skills and understanding in a range of areas. Consequently, there has been a marked improvement in the proportion of children reaching a good level of development.
- The previous inspection report identified the importance of ensuring that pupils fully understood key concepts and ideas before moving on to other areas. The school has developed an assessment system which is sharp and accurate. This enables teachers to be sure about pupils' understanding before moving on in most subjects. Observations and work in pupils' books showed that teachers consistently check pupils' understanding before moving on to more difficult topics. However, teachers do not use the school's assessment system as accurately in science. Consequently, a few pupils do not achieve as well in science as they do in English and mathematics.
- During learning walks, I observed teaching assistants and parent volunteers making a very positive impact on the progress of groups and individuals. Your focus on seamless inclusion as a whole-school objective enables all pupils to share their experiences as well as have their individual needs met by thoughtful activities delivered to a high standard by well-trained additional adults. This is a real strength of the school.
- Leaders of learning have worked effectively to further improve standards of teaching to meet the needs of pupils that are admitted after the school year has already begun. They have learned to respond quickly to changing class needs. Despite these challenges, the high quality of teaching and learning continues to develop at a fast pace which results in impressive progress being made by most pupils. One parent stated, 'I write as a parent who feels both lucky and grateful, there is excellent teaching at Cranfield Academy.' Another parent added, 'The standard of teaching is exceptional.' This strength has developed because of your relentless emphasis on improving the lives of your pupils through memorable and compelling learning experiences.
- While pursuing these lines of enquiry we discussed the barriers for some pupils with specific social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. Although staff provide a high level of care and commitment to pupils, they are also aware of the need to extend and enhance provision in response to an increasing level of SEMH needs.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the curriculum continues to be reviewed and developed so that the needs of pupils are consistently met
- pupils with SEMH needs make rapid progress
- teachers extend pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in science more rapidly by:
 - using assessment information about pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding in science more precisely so that they know what to do to improve.

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

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Cornish
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your deputy headteachers, members of the governing body and I had a discussion over lunch with a group of pupils. Together, we visited a range of classes and learning activities on both school sites. While in classes I looked at pupils' books and briefly listened to pupils read. I observed the arrival of pupils in the morning and spoke to parents. I reviewed school documents about self-evaluation, development planning, school progress data and safeguarding, including the single central record. I also considered the 75 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 74 free-text comments, and 42 responses from staff and 100 from pupils.