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12 February 2019

Mrs Jane Mellor
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Mellor

Short inspection of Costock C of E Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 2019, 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 May 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, your staff and governors have a shared vision for your pupils. Your mission of 'Service to God, each other and ourselves, Truth, Acceptance and Respect' guides all of the school's activities. Collectively, you know the school well and have a strong determination to help all pupils achieve their potential. Parents and carers are appreciative of the school's work and are confident that leaders will develop the school further.

The previous inspection recognised many strengths in leadership and teaching and learning. Despite significant recent changes in staffing, these strengths have been maintained. In this small school, you hold many responsibilities. You have quite rightly sought external support for improvement from the local authority and other schools while key staff are on leave. This support has been particularly effective for newly qualified teachers. Your small team of staff works together very well, and morale is high.

The ethos of the school promotes a very strong inclusive culture. Pupils learn and play with, and alongside, each other in harmony and respect. A parent wrote, 'The best school I could have hoped for. There's a caring environment where every child is known to all the staff and teachers and their welfare and happiness are really important.'

Pupils are enthusiastic and polite. They behave very well and enjoy learning. Pupils have responded very positively to your recent focus on developing their attitudes to learning and coping with setbacks. Pupils spoke appreciatively about the FAIL (First Attempt in

Learning) approach and the 'Power of Yet', as in 'I can't do it, yet'. They say that this helps them persevere with their learning, especially when it becomes more challenging.

Leaders have made recent changes to the curriculum. You have built on existing strengths and have introduced new learning opportunities. Lessons are well planned and aim to increase the links between pupils' prior knowledge and experiences and their new learning. Themes such as 'Would the Beatles have won X Factor?' have engaged the interest of pupils, staff and parents while ensuring that pupils get a good grounding in the necessary subject knowledge and skills. Pupils have opportunities to take part in a wide range of clubs and sporting activities, with the football team having had recent success.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to improve the way that you use assessment information about different groups of pupils to inform improvement plans and teaching. You were also asked to ensure that pupils, including those with SEND, make good progress in all subjects. Leaders now track pupils' progress carefully and share this information regularly with governors. Through your involvement with other schools and through regular moderation, you have improved the quality of teacher assessment so that this is now more accurate. Teachers know their pupils well, and groups of pupils and individuals are generally given effective additional support when it is needed. As one parent told me, 'Children are known as individuals not numbers.' You are working with staff to ensure that they have consistently high expectations of all pupils. Teaching assistants make a strong contribution to the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). These pupils are encouraged to participate fully in school life, and they do so with enthusiasm. As a result of these actions, pupils' attainment in the early years and at the end of key stage 1 improved in 2018.

Leaders have developed effective systems for school improvement planning, self-evaluation and identifying priorities to improve the school further. You involve governors in this process so that they have a clear overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They visit the school regularly so that they can check the work of leaders and the impact on pupils' outcomes for themselves. Governors have a good understanding of the school's assessment information, and they ask challenging questions about the achievement of pupils. As a result, they are increasingly effective in holding you to account for pupils' progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose. The staff I spoke with all understand their responsibilities to act promptly to keep pupils safe. They have regular and effective training so that they know the signs to look out for and how to report these. Leaders work well with outside agencies to provide effective support for pupils and their families when needed. Parents appreciate this support.

Pupils receive a good grounding in how to keep themselves safe and recognise risk. They know how to stay safe online, and they understand the importance of not sharing their personal information. Pupils talk eagerly about the opportunities that they have to learn about safety. They benefit from a wide range of visits and visitors, including the police and the fire service.

Pupils say that incidents of bullying are extremely rare. They are confident that if an incident did happen, leaders would take matters seriously and take appropriate action. Consequently, pupils are safe. All of the pupils and parents I spoke with and those parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree that pupils are happy and safe at the school.

The governing body understands its responsibilities in relation to safeguarding and ensures that the appropriate checks are completed to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we agreed to focus on how well early literacy skills are taught so that all pupils make good progress, what actions leaders are taking to strengthen rates of progress in key stage 2, and how well leaders are managing changes to staffing and increased pupil mobility.
- Children enter the school in Reception with skills that are broadly typical for their age. The proportion who achieve a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year has, however, been consistently lower than the national average. You recognised the need for urgent improvement and provided training and support for staff. As a result, outcomes in 2018 improved and were above the national average. Current pupils are benefiting from well-planned and engaging provision. This small cohort of children settled into school quickly and is making very good progress, particularly with their reading and writing skills.
- The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard at the end of key stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics also improved in 2018 and is now broadly average. Evidence seen during the inspection indicates that this improvement will be sustained this year. More pupils are on track to reach the higher standard in writing this year than has previously been the case. This represents good progress from their starting points.
- The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check fell in 2018. Our visits to see phonics being taught showed that adults model clearly the sounds that letters make and provide help to those who struggle. Workbooks show that most pupils are developing the skills they need to become good readers and writers. However, some pupils with lower starting points are not catching up with their peers as quickly as they might do because tasks and support do not fully meet their needs. Reading books for some of these pupils do not match their abilities.
- In this school, the number of pupils in each cohort is often small. Attainment can fluctuate considerably from year-to-year depending on pupils' prior attainment and needs. Pupils' attainment and progress at the end of key stage 2 has been variable over the past three years. Your analysis of these results highlighted the need to make improvements in the teaching of mathematics.
- Leaders subsequently revised the school's approach to teaching mathematics with a focus on developing pupils' 'mastery' of the subject matter. During visits to classrooms in key stage 2, we saw examples of enthusiastic and focused teaching that effectively engaged pupils. We heard pupils confidently discussing their understanding of the purpose of rounding and estimation and justifying the strategies they were using. We

also observed pupils developing their skills of measuring and their understanding of the factors that might get in the way of accuracy. Teachers question pupils skilfully to help them reflect on their work. As a result of strong teaching, most pupils are now making good progress in mathematics. Your careful tracking has identified the need to further strengthen progress for the most able pupils.

- Leaders and governors have managed the recent changes to staffing very well. You have made high-quality appointments to cover temporary absence. You support and guide your staff, nurturing their talents as you do those of your pupils. As a result, teaching and learning remains strong.
- More pupils join or leave the school at different times of the year than is found nationally. You have noted that this increasing mobility can have a detrimental impact on pupils' attainment and progress, particularly when it occurs later in key stage 2. You are developing plans to ensure that mobility is not a barrier to good attainment and progress for these pupils. When I spoke with a group of older pupils who had recently arrived, they were full of praise for the school. Several commented on the welcoming atmosphere and how much they appreciated the benefits of a small school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the progress of younger pupils who need to catch up in reading and writing improves so that all can reach the standards of which they are capable
- pupils who join the school at different times of the year make good progress from their starting points.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Southwell, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Nottinghamshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Sanchez-Thompson
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Together we visited classes in all year groups to observe teaching, learning and assessment. We discussed the school's effectiveness and the actions taken to ensure further improvement. With teachers, I looked at pupils' workbooks to check the progress they are making.

I met with teachers to discuss the early years foundation stage and the teaching of

phonics. I spoke with three members of the local governing body and a representative of the local authority. I also spoke with a group of staff. I met with a group of pupils from key stage 2 and talked informally with other pupils in lessons and during lunchtime. I met with parents on the playground at the beginning of the school day.

I looked at a range of documents, including your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and the school's improvement plan. I also scrutinised the school's safeguarding systems, records and associated documents. I checked assessment information on how well pupils are achieving. I considered 31 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 19 written comments from parents. There were no responses to the staff questionnaire or the pupils' questionnaire.