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Mrs Wendy Foster
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Foster

Short inspection of Cirencester Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 26 February 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 July 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 have established and developed a skilled leadership team since you joined the school in September 2015. As senior leaders, you are outward-looking in seeking best practice in order to enhance leadership, teaching and the curriculum in the school. You now work closely and benefit from wider expertise within a partnership programme across a range of schools.

Pupils are enthusiastic learners and show pride in their work. Pupils and their parents value the breadth of opportunities in the curriculum, particularly for sport. As one parent expressed, 'Sports leadership is very strong, inclusive and encouraging. The opportunities within the curriculum and as enrichment are valuable.'

At the time of the previous inspection the school was asked to develop the teaching of mathematics so that pupils were challenged to reach the higher standard in key stage 2. You have successfully implemented a new approach to develop pupils' calculation and problem-solving skills. This is being taught well across the school and pupils are enthusiastic and diligent in their mathematics lessons. The standard of current work shows that more of the older pupils are now deepening their mathematical reasoning and working towards the higher standard.

There have been demographic changes in the local area, which means that the school now caters for a more socially and ethnically diverse community than it has in the past. There is a higher proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) than at the time of the previous inspection. You and governors are very positive about the increasing diversity of the school. All leaders and teachers have adapted plans and ways of teaching in order to meet pupils' different needs. The rate of change has been rapid. The staff survey indicates that some changes have been unpopular with staff. However, the decisions you have taken have been necessary in order to ensure pupils' inclusion and progress. Your current plans accurately identify where further improvement is needed to regain previously high standards in all parts of the school. Your skilled governors support and appropriately challenge you on the progress of the plan. However, the information you hold about pupils' achievement is not analysed precisely enough. Consequently, your ability to set targets and monitor the impact of the actions you have taken is weakened.

Safeguarding is effective.

The policies and procedures of the school in relation to safeguarding are fit for purpose. Training is up to date and record-keeping is comprehensive and effective. Leaders have established a culture whereby all staff know and confidently use the school's systems to refer concerns that a pupil may be at risk of harm. Leaders are knowledgeable about safeguarding and are prompt in referring and following up concerns in order to keep pupils safe. The school carries out checks on all staff and volunteers who come into contact with pupils to ensure they are safe to do so. Records of the checks are kept securely and regularly reviewed by governors.

Pupils say they feel safe in school because their teachers and friends are caring and look out for them. Pupils value the teaching they have on how to keep themselves safe, for example through fire drills and teaching about the safe use of the internet. Most pupils behave well and overall the school is an orderly environment. Pupils feel that bullying is rare but say there are a small number of pupils who repeat poor behaviours, both in the playground and in the classroom. Pupils say that although these incidents are dealt with, they do not stop. Equally, the Ofsted surveys for staff and parents highlighted concerns about the behaviour of some pupils and indicated that the behaviour policy is not always used effectively. The rate of fixed-term exclusions this academic year has been high. Incidents of misbehaviour are recorded appropriately. However, they are not analysed sufficiently clearly to identify if the actions of leaders improve the behaviour of this small group of pupils.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection I reviewed the progress pupils make in writing across the school, including towards the higher standard in key stage 2. I also reviewed the standard of phonic skills in the current Year 1. Lastly, I focused on the progress children make across the Nursery and Reception classes.
- At both key stages 1 and 2, the proportion of pupils who achieve well in writing has been very low over recent years. Leaders have put in place new ways of

teaching writing, whereby pupils develop their writing skills in a range of subjects. This is increasing pupils' interest and breadth of opportunities for expressive writing. For example, pupils in Year 6 wrote biographies of Thomas Edison as part of their science and history work. The most able pupils organised their ideas well and varied their sentence structure to add interest. Other pupils, however, do not always organise their information in a clear sequence. Gaps in basic sentence punctuation undermined the accuracy of their writing. Although pupils are now expected to correct their errors, opportunities to improve the content of their work are infrequent. Consequently, pupils do not learn how to improve their ideas or overcome errors from previous writing.

- The current Year 2 pupils had low starting points and achievement in writing within the year group is still low. Many Year 2 pupils still lack basic skills and so teachers are building pupils' confidence to write through regular short practice activities. Currently, pupils are not applying their skills in writing in line with the school's expectations and there is little developed writing in their workbooks. Leaders acknowledge that there is a lack of clarity within their approach to the teaching of writing for pupils in key stage 1. However, the writing produced by the most able children in the Reception classes shows that they are already working at or beyond a good level of development.
- For the past two years the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has declined and been well below the national average. Leaders have responded to this dip in attainment by implementing a new programme for teaching phonic skills. Visits to Year 1 classes during the inspection showed that the programme is being used effectively and Year 1 pupils engage enthusiastically in the reading tasks.
- Teachers use assessment accurately to pitch the level of teaching to pupils' needs and the most able pupils are challenged well in their reading. Currently, although making better progress, questions remain as to whether enough pupils will achieve as well as they should.
- Teachers have identified that many more children now join the school with weak communication skills which limit their access to other learning. Standards at the end of the Reception year in 2018 were below the national average but improvements to teaching led to a higher proportion of children attaining the early learning goal in speaking. However, weak speaking and listening skills remain a barrier for children in early years. Planning for learning is not identifying how language is developed for children at different ages across the Nursery and Reception classes. In practice, because planning is not clear, staff talk to children and question them, but they do not help children to answer in ways which will promote their progress.
- Almost all children who attend the Nursery move into the Reception classes. Leaders recognise that there is a need to develop teaching and learning more consistently across both year groups. Children in the Nursery and the Reception classes enjoy learning in bright and spacious accommodation. The welfare arrangements are good. In both settings, however, when children are not being directly taught as individuals or in small groups, some learning activities are not planned sufficiently well to promote children's progress. Leaders have drawn up

an action plan to develop the early years setting more holistically than has happened in the past. Currently, however, the plan lacks precise targets for children's progress across the setting.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they :

- sharpen the evaluation of information they hold about pupils' behaviour and achievement so that they can more precisely plan for improvement and judge the impact of their actions
- implement the school's behaviour policy effectively so that fixed-term exclusions are reduced and the needs of pupils with challenging behaviour are met well
- improve the teaching of writing so that more pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, attain more highly at the end of Year 2 and Year 6
- raise attainment in the early years by establishing effective leadership and teaching across the Nursery and the Reception classes.

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

Yours sincerely

Wendy Marriott
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection I met with you and other senior leaders. Together, we visited classes in English and mathematics across the school. I spoke with pupils about their learning and heard some read in Year 1. We also visited the Nursery classes. I took account of the school's latest assessments of pupils' achievement and reviewed samples of pupils' writing in English. I held a meeting with a group of governors and made a telephone call to a representative of the local authority. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and school development plan. I held discussions about safeguarding and reviewed the school's procedures. I held a meeting with a group of pupils to take account of their views of the school. I spoke to parents at the start of the school day and took account of the 39 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I considered the views of staff through the 44 responses to the online staff survey.