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Mrs Cathy Bailey
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Dear Mrs Bailey

Short inspection of The Duke of Bedford Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 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 March 2014.

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.**

Since the previous inspection, the school has not maintained its standards of attainment. Results in national tests and assessments have been mixed. Children make a sound start in the early years and in key stage 1. Attainment at the end of the Reception Year and in the Year 1 phonics check is at least in line with national figures, and was above average in 2018. Outcomes for seven-year-olds at the end of key stage 1 have also been positive, with pupils reaching standards broadly in line with national figures. In contrast, results at the end of key stage 2 have been weaker in recent years, notably in reading and mathematics. Only half of the pupils achieved the expected standard in all three subjects of reading, writing and mathematics; this is below the national figure of around two thirds. The most able pupils and disadvantaged pupils, in particular, have not made good progress from their starting points at the end of Year 2. Increased rates of pupil mobility have made it difficult to show improvement in headline results, particularly when pupils have joined the school in Year 5 or Year 6. Nonetheless, too many pupils have gone on to secondary school without the grounding they need.

Leaders know where standards need to rise and have taken suitable steps to strengthen the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Years 3 to 6. The school has turned a corner in terms of the quality of teaching in key stage 2, where

current provision is demonstrably stronger than in previous years. Appointments in the last couple of years have brought new energy and expertise. However, there remains an over-reliance on interventions and targeted support for key pupils, rather than a wholesale drive to raise expectations of what all pupils can achieve. It is still evident that some teaching does not do enough to stretch pupils, either in terms of difficulty and/or quantity of work, in English and mathematics.

Staff work hard to implement new strategies that are introduced to raise standards. For example, subject leaders have reviewed and revised approaches to teaching mathematics and reading, and have introduced more frequent diagnostic assessments. Staff morale is buoyant. All who responded to Ofsted's staff survey consider that the school is better than at the time of the previous inspection. Although not all class teachers responded to the survey, staff agreed that leaders consider their workload and avoid unnecessary burdens when making improvements.

Pupils enjoy school. The HEART values of 'honesty', 'empathy', 'achievement', 'respect' and 'teamwork' are reflected in the positive and trusting relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils say they always have someone they can turn to if they feel unhappy, and know that they can use the 'worry box' if they need to share their concerns. Pupils are polite and generally very well behaved. They show consideration for others, and try and understand those who are at times poorly behaved. Pupils have good attitudes to learning and take pride in their work and their successes. They say that they enjoy the 'daily mile' because it gives them a chance to refresh their minds in the afternoon, even if the weather is cold and drizzly!

Parents and carers are broadly positive about the school, but are not readily forthcoming in expressing their views, either in response to the Ofsted inspection survey, Parent View, or to the school's own surveys. The recent café programme is a good initiative to better engage with parents. Most of the 34 responses to the inspection questionnaire were positive about the school, although around one in five raised concerns. Some respondents were glowing with praise, particularly if their children have come from other schools, and where staff have provided excellent support for individuals. A few parents said that they feel that their concerns around bullying are too readily brushed aside and that leaders are not approachable. Inspection evidence, including talking to pupils, suggests that leaders do take any reports of bullying seriously and take action in response to concerns.

At the previous inspection, leaders were asked to improve the quality of teaching and ensure that teachers plan work that provides the right level of challenge for pupils, especially the most able. Inspection evidence shows that the quality of teaching is still too variable. Brisk questioning and carefully prepared resources enable some teaching to proceed apace, with pupils well focused and keen to complete their tasks, while in other sessions the demands of learning are much more gentle because pupils take time to complete low-level tasks without obvious challenge.

Governors know the school well and provide good support for school leaders. Links with a local school are proving productive because staff can share ideas and test out proven strategies for raising standards. The commissioning of an external audit of the school's effectiveness in 2017, in contrast, had little constructive value in steering necessary improvements in teaching.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that the school meets statutory requirements in regard to completing safeguarding checks and the recording of information, and review policies and procedures regularly to reflect the latest published guidance. Governors regularly check that records are accurately maintained and are up to date. Pre-employment checks on the suitability of adults to work with children are thorough. Staff have regular training and updates on how to keep pupils safe from harm, and records of this training are well kept.

Leaders work with external agencies to ensure that pupils in need of professional support can access the help they need. Adults are alert to concerns about pupils' welfare and respond quickly when there are signs that pupils are in any way unhappy.

The school has nurtured an open culture where pupils speak freely about their worries, regardless of how minor they might seem. Pupils talk confidently about how to stay safe. They are happy to chat informally to adults and talk about any issues they have, and the 'daily mile' provides an opportunity to do so.

Inspection findings

- Given the comparatively weak key stage 2 results in recent years, this visit focused on the quality of teaching and learning in Years 3 to 6, and whether currently pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The weaker progress of disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils was also a specific focus for this inspection.
- It is evident that leaders know what needs to improve in terms of raising standards in English and mathematics, and that the school has the capacity to address this underachievement.
- In recent years, teaching has not been strong enough in Years 3, 4 and 5, and too much reliance has been placed on good teaching in Year 6 to enable pupils to catch up. Recent appointments and new arrangements have strengthened provision across the whole of key stage 2, and this more consistent quality was evident in pupils' work and in observations of teaching and learning.
- Sensible strategies have been introduced to raise standards in mathematics, including an emphasis on pupils learning their 'times tables' and regular opportunities to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills. The 'before' and 'after' assessments for each unit of work show that pupils are making clear and sustained gains in their learning. Pupils enjoy doing mathematics and say they like the challenge of difficult work when they then grasp new methods.

Evidence from observations supports the view that older pupils are stretched in their work, but the more able and confident mathematicians sometimes have to complete too many straightforward tasks, and do not get on to the challenging tasks quickly enough. Conversely, pupils who finish quickly do not routinely apply methods to check the accuracy of their answers, for example by using inverse calculations or estimation.

- Leaders have also introduced a raft of sensible initiatives to raise standards in reading and writing, some of which are embedded in everyday teaching, while others are delivered as intervention support. Leaders point to evidence of pupils making accelerated progress in the school's assessment and tracking information. Work in pupils' books shows that some pupils have made good progress since September, but not as strong as school data might indicate. Several pupils were keen to explain exactly how the quality of their writing had improved. However, on the whole, older pupils in key stage 2 do not show any great enthusiasm for reading, and their ability to decode unfamiliar words and read for inference is not strong, given that this has been a key focus of the school's work.
- Disadvantaged pupils have tended to make weaker progress than their classmates. The school's evaluation of the impact of its use of pupil premium funding is superficial, and sheds little light on the reasons for underachievement and how the school is successfully addressing this issue.
- Although not a key line of inquiry for this inspection, work seen across the wider curriculum lacked the same level of challenge and focus as pupils' work in English and mathematics. For example, in Years 3 to 6, pupils' learning in history, geography and religious education topics is not planned or sequenced in a way that cumulatively builds essential subject knowledge and skills. In simple terms, pupils learn about topics without clear enough focus or purpose. In addition, more could be done to develop and consolidate pupils' literacy and numeracy skills in their topic work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils in key stage 2 make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics by checking not only that work is pitched at the right level, but that pupils are moved on at the right pace in lessons so that they are suitably stretched in their learning
- a more forthright evaluation of the many improvement strategies is undertaken in order to:
 - consider more closely the impact on pupils' learning and progress, including for disadvantaged pupils and the most able
 - avoid initiative overload
- in the longer term, the wider curriculum in subjects other than English and mathematics is thoroughly reviewed, so that:
 - subject leaders check that topics are coherent and sensibly sequenced

- units of work are broken down into teaching that is more sharply focused on the core of learning that pupils need to acquire
- the wider curriculum better supports pupils' learning in reading, writing and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and other members of your leadership team. We jointly observed teaching and learning in each of the school's classes, and made a short visit to the Nursery, which opened on the school site in September 2017. I spoke informally to pupils about their work during lessons, and, together, we reviewed a sample of written work from pupils in key stage 2. I talked formally to a group of pupils and to three governors and discussed aspects of school provision with individual members of staff. I spoke to a few parents at the start of the day. I looked at information on the school's website and evaluated a wide range of additional documentation, much of it provided by the school. We reviewed assessment information on pupils' attainment and progress, as well as leaders' planned actions and evaluations of the impact of the school's work. I took account of the views of staff from Ofsted's staff questionnaire and the views of the 34 parental responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, which included many free-text comments.