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7 March 2018

Mrs Nichola Chesterton
Head of School
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Dear Mrs Chesterton

Short inspection of Hambridge Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 February 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 predecessor school was judged to be good in February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since you started at the school a year ago, you have set about building solid systems to support the improvement of teaching, learning and assessment. With the firm support of governors and the executive principal, you enthusiastically work to ensure that pupils can, 'be the best they can be'.

While doing this, you have been careful to maintain strengths of the school that are particularly valued by parents and carers and pupils. For example, extra-curricular activities continue to provide additional rich experiences for pupils. These activities, before or after school, ensure that pupils can join in with something that interests them. A wide range of activities is available, such as street dance, cooking, gardening and study club. A typical comment from parents was, 'This school brings out the best in our children.' Links with other schools in London and France also contribute to pupils' appreciation and understanding of others, which in turn supports their personal development.

An area for improvement at the previous inspection was to increase pupils' independence. Teachers and teaching assistants support pupils' thirst for knowledge by providing interesting learning environments and activities. Pupils are confident to tackle more challenging activities and to use resources to find things out. They use the 'working walls' to help them to understand what they are learning.

You have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas to improve. Pupils generally leave the school well prepared for their next steps. However, you are not at all complacent. You rightly focus on improving pupils' achievement even further. This has meant some significant changes in how things are done. The staff team is behind you and morale is high. You look beyond the school for advice and learn from good practice in other schools. For example, pupils' breaks have been re-organised to support pupils' learning through the morning. Pupils say that this helps them to be more alert and focused.

You have introduced rigorous systems to check on and improve the progress that pupils make. As a result, the progress of certain groups of pupils is improving. For example, outcomes in Reception rose sharply in 2017 and were above national averages compared with the previous year when they were well below the national average. Through your analysis of the outcomes from 2017, you have put in place further improvements to the teaching of phonics and spelling across the school. Your comprehensive, yet precise school improvement plan highlights priorities, including improving boys' writing.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. As designated safeguarding lead, you ensure that you and your staff receive an appropriate range of safeguarding training. Safeguarding is firmly on the agenda at staff meetings and staff are clear about their responsibilities to notice and report any concerns. You are quick to seek advice from others as needed. For example, you liaise with professionals able to support pupils' mental health issues.

Governors have a strong understanding of their responsibilities around safeguarding and provide solid support as well as challenge to ensure that all procedures are in place. Recruitment arrangements, for example, are secure.

Inspection findings

- During my visit, we focused on some particular areas to explore in more detail. We agreed to look at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the early years classes because children's outcomes in 2016 were too low. Fewer children than the national average started Year 1 with the skills and understanding expected for their age. Since then, you have made significant changes to the leadership of early years.
- Expectations are high and outcomes for children are quickly improving. Children in the pre-school are well cared for. Staff provide a secure yet stimulating learning environment. In the Reception class, learning is carefully organised. Children enjoy a balance of direct teaching and being able to explore learning activities inside and outside. Strong communication between the early years classes supports the improvements being made. Current assessments provided by the school show that far more children in Reception have the skills, knowledge and understanding that are expected for their age.

- We also looked at improvements being made to phonics and spelling across the school. Outcomes for phonics in the Year 1 screening check have been below national averages for the past two years. Last year, in Year 6, outcomes in spelling were also below national averages. Improving pupils' phonics and spelling has been a whole-school priority this school year.
- Working closely with the new subject leader, you have introduced new teaching resources and methods. The daily teaching of phonics and spelling has been introduced. A new handwriting style that supports pupils' spelling is now the expectation across the school. You and your leadership team regularly look at pupils' books to check improvements to pupils' phonics and spelling. Current assessments show that far more pupils have a secure understanding of phonics in Year 1. Pupils in key stage 2 talk about being more confident in their writing, now that they more clearly understand spelling rules and know where to look if they need help to spell words.
- However, pupils' books across the year groups show that there are few examples of pupils using their improving spelling skills in their writing. Pupils' writing in subjects across the curriculum is limited. Boys' writing, in particular, often lacks depth or development. We agreed that now more pupils are becoming confident to spell, the expectation that they use their writing skills in a range of subjects should also increase.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- achievement in writing continues to rise, particularly for boys, by ensuring that pupils use their phonic and spelling skills to write in a range of subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Tonwen Empson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with leaders, and visits were made with the head of school to see learning across the school. We also visited the pre-school, 'Little Levels', which is on another site. Together, we looked at a range of pupils' workbooks.

I spoke to staff and pupils informally. I met with the trust's chief education officer who is also the executive principal. I spoke on the telephone to an improvement adviser and a representative from the local authority, who both support school improvement. I had a meeting with several governors, including the chair of the governing body and a governor who also sits on the board of trustees.

I scrutinised key school documents, including those to do with safeguarding, the school improvement plan and the school's self-evaluation document. I looked at recruitment procedures, including the single central record.

I took into account the views gathered from parents at the start of the day, the 47 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and two letters from parents received during the inspection. I also took account of the 14 responses from staff to an online staff survey.