

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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23 June 2016

Mrs Katie Lawson  
Executive Headteacher  
Costessey Infant School  
Beaumont Road  
New Costessey  
Norwich  
NR5 0HG

Dear Mrs Lawson

### **Short inspection of Costessey Infant School**

Following my visit to the school on 7 June 2016, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in June 2013.

### **This school continues to be good.**

Since the previous inspection, the school has converted to academy status, joining a multi-academy trust in September 2013. In January 2015, the school came under your leadership as executive headteacher of both the infant school and the nearby junior school. There has also been a large turnover of staff, with many of the teaching staff currently in the school joining since the previous inspection. Senior staff work across both schools and there is now a single governing body for both schools. This has provided strong and effective leadership, which is ensuring that the school remains good.

Your leadership group forms a strong and cohesive team that is highly committed to the school's further improvement. Leaders know the school well; they visit classes regularly and are well known by pupils, who are used to being spoken to about their learning by leaders during lessons. Leaders carry out regular 'three-minute walks', dropping into every class to sample the experiences which pupils are receiving. Leaders look at pupils' books to see if achievement is good enough, and to check that school policies, for example on marking and feedback, are being carried out effectively. Leaders also scrutinise assessment information and meet with staff to discuss the progress of each pupil. This means that you and your senior staff have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Your development plan is closely linked to your evaluation of the school and identifies the correct things

that it needs to do to improve further. The strength of this team was demonstrated by the fact that, during your recent absence, the school continued to run smoothly and efficiently under the acting headship of the two assistant headteachers.

Governors and trustees support leaders in their work. Members of the local governing body visit the school regularly and have increased the level of challenge they provide for you and the school; they ask more questions, for example about the differences in achievement between different year groups. However, governors are not always provided with information in a sufficiently clear and succinct format to enable them to delve as deeply into pupil achievement as they need to. Consequently, they cannot always check in detail that, for example, all groups of pupils are achieving as well as they should and use this to challenge you and other leaders about the actions being taken to address any underperformance.

Since you became executive headteacher of both schools, staff from the infant and junior schools work closely together. Staff told the inspector that they valued this. They believe that this development has strengthened the quality of teaching and learning because teachers in different year groups were gaining a better understanding of what pupils had already learned and would need to learn in the future. The majority of staff who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire said that they are well supported by leaders and that they enjoy working at the school. Staff told me that they benefit from regular opportunities for professional development and that they support each other well across both schools.

Pupils enjoy attending school. Pupils spoken to during the inspection told me about the many aspects of school that they enjoy, such as trips and using the outside play equipment. One pupil said that her teacher 'does fun things so that we enjoy learning'. Pupils are well behaved, sociable and describe the school as a very friendly place to be. They speak to each other, and to adults, with respect. In lessons they listen and respond to adult direction sensibly. Pupils told me that sometimes pupils misbehave at playtime, mainly through 'rough play', but teachers quickly deal with this. As a result, the school is a calm, orderly and pleasant place to be. The majority of parents who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire said that their child is happy in school and that pupils behave well. A small number of parents were concerned that behaviour was not always as good as it could be.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders ensure that pupils are well looked after while at school. They fulfil all statutory responsibilities for safeguarding. Careful checks are carried out on staff employed at the school and on others, such as volunteers. Staff receive regular training on safeguarding issues so that they know exactly what to do if they have a concern about a child. Records of concerns are kept securely and acted upon in a timely manner. The lead professional for safeguarding keeps careful and detailed records of all concerns, liaises with outside agencies regularly and ensures that any appropriate action is taken. The school's head of pastoral care and her team work closely with parents. They have created an ethos where parents trust the school and willingly work with staff over safeguarding issues.

## Inspection findings

- You and your team have thought carefully about how to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. You have spoken with teachers, pupils and parents about the barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils and used this information to put in place clear plans for reducing the gap between these pupils and others in the school. You have recognised that, previously, support provided has been too general and has not been tracked carefully enough to ensure that it has been effective. You now have much better systems for establishing the impact of support provided. This is helping you to carefully focus on, and use, those strategies which are proving to be most effective.
- You have devised a school-specific programme for improving the social skills and confidence of disadvantaged pupils, as you identified this as one of the reasons why they do not achieve as well as they should. This is having a positive impact on their attitudes to learning. You have provided these pupils with additional teaching support in small groups and individually, and scrutiny of pupils' books shows that disadvantaged pupils are making better progress in literacy and in mathematics. However, you recognise that more still needs to be done. You are looking at best practice in other schools to identify what else the school can do to support disadvantaged pupils. You recognise that supporting these pupils within lessons is key to ensuring that achievement continues to improve.
- Leaders have identified the need to further improve writing in the school so that achievement is as high as it is for reading and mathematics. The subject leader for writing has provided staff with clear guidance and support for their planning to ensure that all genres are covered. This has been successful and is reflected in the work in pupils' books. Staff compare writing across year groups and across phases, as well as moderating their judgements across the different schools in the academy trust. This is creating a clear understanding of what is expected of pupils in each year group.
- Much work has been done to promote writing opportunities across the curriculum and these are providing engaging contexts for pupils. During this inspection I saw some good writing about knights and castles linked to a history topic. In the Reception classes, children are developing an enthusiasm for writing. They are given many opportunities to write in different contexts, for example writing invitations and annotating pictures that they have drawn. As a result, children often choose to write and are developing confidence in their ability to produce written work independently.
- Pupils' books show that teachers follow the school's marking policy. Teachers regularly comment on pupils' writing, and pupils often respond. This was an area identified for improvement in the previous inspection report. However, in some classes basic errors in writing, such as lack of full stops and capital letters, are not regularly identified. As a result, pupils continue to make similar errors. Some feedback, such as that related to spelling errors, is not having a positive impact on subsequent learning because pupils are not encouraged to

accurately practice the spellings corrected and refer to these when writing next time.

- Leaders are aware that the achievement of boys in reading and writing is generally lower than that of girls in Year 1 and Year 2. A more cross-curricular approach to writing is helping to address this. The school has changed the topics studied so that they more readily engage boys as well as girls, and has selected reading texts which will appeal to boys. Pupils interviewed during the inspection, including boys, said that they liked writing. Boys in the Reception classes show an enthusiasm for reading and writing, choosing, for example, to read independently in the outdoor reading area. As a result of the steps taken by the school, boys are showing greater enjoyment of, and engagement with, reading and writing. However, occasionally, they are allowed to be careless with their written work, omitting punctuation which they are clearly capable of using and presenting their work in an untidy manner.
- The previous inspection report identified the need to improve the attainment of the most able pupils. Leaders have been successful in increasing the proportion of pupils achieving above the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2. The most able pupils are regularly expected to enhance their written work, for example by including adverbs and extended sentences within their writing. Pupils' books show that the most able pupils are provided with additional challenges in mathematics, particularly in Year 2, so that they use their skills in calculation to deepen their mathematical understanding. However, in Year 1 pupils sometimes repeat calculations unnecessarily and are not moved on quickly enough in their learning.
- The curriculum provides interesting and engaging opportunities for learning which pupils enjoy. New curriculum plans have been implemented which ensure that sufficient time is given all subjects and that different subjects are linked together sensibly through topics. Leaders recognise that more emphasis now needs to be placed on developing pupils' skills in subjects such as science.
- Since the previous inspection, the outside area for the Reception classes has been further developed. This has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. The outside area provides an attractive and engaging space where a good range of activities is provided for children. Pupils in the Reception classes cooperate well and often show independence, selecting activities and resources, and persevering in their learning. Adults in the Reception classes intervene with children's play skilfully, asking questions which extend their thinking. Achievements are recorded accurately and are used by teachers who plan together and then modify activities to meet children's individual needs. As a result, children are making good progress and the proportion of pupils on track to achieve a good level of development at the end of this year is higher than the national average.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- staff expertise, for example in mathematics and in the use of feedback, is shared across all classes
- leaders provide governors with clear, succinct information which enables them to check more closely the achievement of all pupils and groups of pupils
- the wider curriculum is further developed so that pupils' skills in subjects such as science and geography are developed more systematically.

Yours sincerely

Maria Curry

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, your assistant headteachers, your subject leader for writing, your safeguarding leader and with other staff jointly. I also met with two trustees and three governors. Some meetings were conducted jointly with Her Majesty's Inspector, Heather Yaxley, who was inspecting the junior school on the same day. I met with a small number of pupils in Year 1 and Year 2. I scrutinised a range of school documents, including information about safeguarding, school development planning and school self-evaluation. I observed teaching in all classes and evaluated pupils' work.