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Mrs Katie Merriman
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Merriman

Short inspection of Gastrells Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 March 2017, 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 April 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You have successfully used the expertise in your senior leadership team and governing body to refine and develop the strengths of the school. You identify the areas that require further development accurately and take appropriate action to make any necessary improvements. You work well with the local authority and ensure that the school continues to meet pupils' needs effectively.

Gastrells is a very caring school where the ethos and values are demonstrable. This begins at the door to the school where the ceramic 'poppy field' welcomes visitors. It continues with the displays of work and success all around the school. Leaders, and governors with the support of parents, are working hard to live up to the school's vision of 'a flying start to a life of learning'. This reflects the emphasis that you put on the process of learning across the curriculum, preparing children for life in and beyond school. The school places high value on the individual and gives equal emphasis to promoting confidence, cooperation, independence and readiness for future learning. Since the previous inspection, there has been a change in the senior leadership team, teaching and support staff. However, all staff uphold these values and create a harmonious, supportive environment in which children learn well, and are happy, safe and secure. As a result, pupils across all year groups are making good progress and show good attitudes to their learning. Pupils show high levels of engagement in their learning. They feel valued and are proud to be part of the school.

Parents who spoke to me or responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, were extremely positive about the school and would recommend it to others. They acknowledge the noticeable difference you have made to the quality of pupils' learning and progress. Comments such as, 'the school is wonderful – my son has progressed in leaps and bounds,' are typical. The school's warm, friendly atmosphere is highly valued by parents who said that their children are supported well and feel 'safe and cared for'.

A range of extra activities and experiences enhances the school's broad curriculum. You have developed a 'Gastrells' way' of supporting the school's vulnerable pupils. Your use of the nurture group, Judo, and work in the mental health project are producing good results in the shape of pupils' positive attitudes to learning and to each other and in their pride in their school. Vulnerable pupils' behaviour and attitudes to school are good and they talk about how their teachers 'really help us'. The school's values are well demonstrated in the good use made of the Communications and Interactions Centre (CIC), which supports pupils who have additional and often complex language or behavioural needs. These children work within the centre and join the other classes for a range of activities, but are part of the school.

Pupils are polite and welcoming to visitors. Their conduct around school and on the playground is consistently good, and older pupils show maturity in the way that they take care of their younger classmates. Pupils show positive attitudes to learning in their lessons, and say that they enjoy a range of different subjects. Pupils told me that they have particularly enjoyed the school trips that they have been on, such as the trip to the Skills Zone, where they learned about all aspects of safety. They also appreciate learning about equality and British values and they say that it helps them to 'understand better'. A forest-school area enhances the curriculum.

The previous inspection asked teachers to provide pupils with more opportunities to work things out for themselves, by making their own decisions. Work in pupils' books shows that teachers regularly give them problems to tackle in mathematics, and that pupils have plenty of opportunities to practise their writing skills in their own pieces of written work. Older pupils explained to me what they needed to do to improve their work, such as improving their handwriting or working on recall of multiplication tables. This was another area that you were asked to work on following the previous inspection, and where there have been clear improvements.

You acknowledge that the website has issues that need addressing. Results in the 2016 key stage 1 and key stage 2 assessments show that there is still more to be done to secure the very best outcomes for the pupils, particularly in writing and mathematics. We agreed that the new system used for recording your pupils' progress needs to offer more accurate information about assessments to help staff with the detail of their planning.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality. Leaders ensure that rigorous checks are made on staff, governors, volunteers and regular visitors to the school to make sure that they are suitable people to work with children.

Staff and governors take part in regular training so that they have up-to-date knowledge of the latest good practice in safeguarding. As a result, they have a good understanding of signs that might indicate that all is not well with a pupil. They also know the appropriate procedures to follow if they have a concern about a pupil's well-being. Leaders responsible for overseeing safeguarding ensure that any concerns are documented carefully and followed up. Effective links with external agencies provide additional help to the most vulnerable pupils and their families. Participation in the mental health project helps staff and pupils understand even more about safety.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and have a good understanding of different situations in which they would need to keep themselves safe. Older pupils speak confidently about staying safe online and understand the need to use social media in a responsible way.

Inspection findings

- We agreed to review the progress of pupils, especially girls, in mathematics. This was because the proportion of lower attaining girls who reached the expected standard was below the national average in 2016. School analysis of past data showed that mathematics achievement needed to be as good as that in reading. You have rectified this and teaching of calculation is strong. You had a change of mathematics leader last year and one of their first actions was to design a mathematics passport that focuses on calculation. This has brought about an improvement in the level of mathematical ability, including mental dexterity, for all pupils. Girls said that they enjoyed this challenge. Parents are invited to school to see what the pupils do in mathematics. Our visits to the classrooms, my scrutiny of pupils' books and your progress information show that all pupils, including the girls, are making good progress overall in mathematics.
- You have introduced a mathematics problem-solving programme in Years 5 and 6 which reinforces and consolidates understanding of mathematical concepts. This is having a positive impact on the progress of your current pupils. The leadership of mathematics is strong. Teachers and support staff are provided with effective support and training to improve their quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Teachers have good subject knowledge in mathematics. They use assessment information effectively to plan learning that builds on what pupils already know and can do. This ensures that pupils make good progress from their starting points. Pupils told me that they enjoy learning mathematics and that it is taught well. We agreed that this programme should be enhanced, following its success in Years 5 and 6, and applied across the school to develop pupils' reasoning skills.

- Another key line of enquiry was to consider why boys' attainment and progress have been typically below those of girls in writing, grammar, punctuation and spelling. The school's analysis of the 2016 data resulted in a new focus on grammar, punctuation and spelling, designed to improve writing. The 2016 cohort was two thirds boys, of whom nearly half were disadvantaged pupils, or were part of the CIC, or had special educational needs and/or disabilities. With this in mind, the school purchased a large number of books which have exactly addressed their needs. When pupils were reading to me, they talked enthusiastically about their reading books and could relate how these books have helped develop their writing, making it more exciting and adventurous.
- Writing is taught effectively throughout the school, and teachers give pupils plenty of opportunities to practise their writing skills. This was evident in pupils' books and in classroom displays, which included examples of pupils' writing in different subjects. There is a whole-school, daily dedicated time slot where phonics, sentence structure, spelling and grammar are taught in a more focused way, according to key stage, needs and ability. This is monitored closely for progress, particularly in key stage 1 and the lower part of key stage 2. One-to-one interventions support pupils who have particular needs. Older pupils build on these skills in their writing, and their use of more complex punctuation is becoming more secure. This was demonstrated admirably by a boy who was proud of his work, showing me a high-quality story written as part of his entry to the national 500-word story competition.
- More pupils are working at the expected standard in grammar, punctuation and spelling and the most able pupils are beginning to reach the higher level. Your judgement that high-quality writing is most successfully achieved if pupils have high-quality reading books, which challenge their comprehension skills, has borne fruit. School assessment information reflects this improvement and more pupils, including the boys, are on track to achieve age-related expectations than last year.
- A further line of enquiry was to look at the strength the school has in supporting pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities in making good progress. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) leads this aspect of the school's work well with a very detailed knowledge of the needs of every pupil. Your activities, including links to the CIC, setting up the nurture programme and your involvement in the mental health project, have been of immense value in supporting vulnerable pupils. Staff ensure that they are planning work that is at the right level for pupils of different abilities.
- Effective interventions address the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, lower attaining pupils, and boys. Staff work closely with you to identify need and quickly provide necessary support. Because of this work, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, many of whom are boys, have access to the curriculum and achieve well whatever their starting points or particular needs. The result of your actions shows that these pupils are making good progress across the school.
- The final line of enquiry was to look at attendance. For the last academic year,

this was below the national average, and disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities were absent more frequently. Leaders monitor pupils' absence with tenacity. Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have lower attendance rates, mainly due to numerous important medical appointments. School leaders are aware of these and monitor them closely as well as endeavouring to support family needs. As a result, attendance has risen this year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the support for reasoning skills started in Years 5 and 6 is enhanced and extended to all year groups to develop and challenge further all pupils' mathematical skills so they reach higher standards
- the recently acquired assessment system is developed further so that it can be manipulated to inform all staff about the progress of individuals and groups of pupils
- the school's website is compliant with statutory requirements.

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

Terry Mortimer
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, your deputy headteacher and the SENCo. The inspection also involved a meeting with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body, and one other governor. I spoke to a representative from the local authority. I reviewed 47 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and sought parents' views when they brought their children to school. We visited all the classrooms together with your deputy headteacher and SENCo to observe pupils' learning and talk to them about it. I looked at the mathematics and English work of pupils with a range of abilities and listened to a range of pupils reading aloud. I examined a wide range of documentation and information relating to your self-evaluation, school improvement planning, equalities, assessment, monitoring and evaluation, and safeguarding.