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Ms Sarah Jones
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Dear Ms Jones

Short inspection of Flamstead Village 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 school was judged to be good in July 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

At Flamstead Village School, each pupil is well known to staff and recognised as an individual. Pupils told me, 'This school is like a big family: everybody knows each other and we care for each other well'. This reflects the school's inclusive ethos, which is demonstrated in practice by you, your staff and governors. The strong community spirit in the school is also appreciated by many parents and carers. Parents' responses to Ofsted's online survey, including their written comments, were highly positive. Almost all parents said that their children are thriving in your care and they would recommend the school to others.

The school environment is well organised, bright and inviting, both indoors and out. Pupils behave well and spoke about how much they like school because their teachers are 'kind and always try to help us'. During my visit, classrooms were calm and lessons focused on learning. Older pupils spoke eloquently about how they are supported to learn and proudly explained that the school's motto, 'aiming high', means 'we try our best in everything we do'.

In the last two years, changes in staffing, and temporary staff absence, affected the continuity and quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. You acted swiftly to challenge weaker teaching and have taken effective action to bring about improvement. Staffing has stabilised and staff are now working with a high level of

teamwork to strengthen teaching and learning. In their responses to Ofsted's online survey, all members of staff said that they are proud to work at the school and share your commitment to achieve the very best for pupils. You acknowledge that there is still more work to be done to ensure that the most effective teaching approaches are embedded across the school so that all pupils achieve as well as they can.

Since the previous inspection, leaders and governors have been successful in addressing the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report. Children make a good start in the Nursery and Reception class. Staff provide a stimulating and caring environment so that individual needs are met well and children quickly grow in confidence. The children have many opportunities to develop their early reading, writing and number skills in a purposeful way. Subsequently, during their time in early years, children make good progress from their different starting points. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception Year has increased and for the last two years has been above national figures.

Another area for improvement highlighted in the previous inspection was to develop the role of subject leaders so that they assist you to improve teaching and pupils' achievement across all subjects. You have provided effective training and support to your subject leaders to ensure that they have the skills and understanding to successfully monitor the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. Subject leaders now have dedicated time to check teachers' plans, visit lessons and look at pupils' work in books. Subject leaders are increasingly holding teachers to account for the progress pupils make in all subjects. As a result, subject leaders now contribute effectively to the school's capacity to improve further.

Governors know the school well. Through regular visits and meetings with you and your leaders, they have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas that need further improvement. As a result, governors effectively hold you and your leaders to account. For example, they ensure that additional funding, including that for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, is spent effectively. Governors have made a strong contribution to the improvements in recent years and they are equally ambitious that the school continues to thrive in the future.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding within the school. You and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and records are detailed and of a high quality. Recruitment checks are carried out thoroughly by the school secretary: they are up to date and fully meet current requirements. As a result, the school is a safe environment for pupils and they are well cared for at all times.

All staff are well trained and display a secure understanding of safeguarding processes and their importance. They know how to take action if they are

concerned. You work effectively with external agencies to support pupils and families when needed.

Pupils are confident that school is a safe place and told me that they can speak with any member of staff if they have worries. They said that bullying does not happen because 'everyone respects each other'. Parents are also confident that their children are safe and well looked after.

Inspection findings

- In order to check whether the school remains good, I followed a number of lines of enquiry. I considered the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make in key stage 1. This is because, in 2017, the proportion of pupils who attained the expected standard in reading and writing at the end of key stage 1 was below the national average. In addition, the proportion of pupils who attained greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics was below the national average. While the results were skewed by the small number of pupils who undertook the assessments, you identified that in some lessons, tasks were not always well suited to all pupils' abilities.
- You and your leaders have developed well-thought-out plans to address this. For example, staff in key stage 1, including those who are new to teaching this key stage or have recently joined the school, have received appropriate training and support from experienced colleagues. This has ensured that staff have a better understanding of the curriculum and what to expect of pupils in this key stage. Consequently, teachers are increasingly planning work that now meets most pupils' needs and abilities well.
- Pupils' work in books and the school's current assessment information confirm that most pupils are making good progress. However, you acknowledge that some pupils are not suitably challenged and more pupils still need to reach greater depth in mathematics.
- Another line of enquiry focused on how leaders are ensuring that the quality of teaching in mathematics is high and that, from their starting points, pupils achieve well in mathematics. This is because the most recent results for 2017 show that pupils in key stages 1 and 2 did not attain as highly in mathematics as they did in reading and writing.
- Through training and support, you have ensured that staff have higher expectations of what pupils should achieve. You have chosen to teach pupils in single-age groups for mathematics lessons and developed the mathematics curriculum by purchasing a scheme of work to support teachers' planning.
- As a result, this is helping to ensure that there is a more consistent teaching approach to mathematics across the school. During our joint observations of mathematics lessons, we saw effective, high-quality teaching with some strong features. Pupils were investigating numbers and number patterns confidently. We observed that teachers give pupils a range of problems of increasing difficulty and teach pupils strategies to help them to solve these.
- When we looked at pupils' work in their books, we saw a range of calculation

activities. In some classes, pupils' books included examples of more challenging problem-solving tasks that successfully extended and deepened pupils' knowledge and understanding. However, we agreed that this level of challenge was not consistently seen in all books. The school's assessment information shows clearly that, because of the actions you and your leaders have taken to improve the teaching of mathematics, most pupils are now making better progress in this subject throughout the school.

- Finally, I looked at how well you and your leaders ensure that the needs of the most able pupils are being met, so that they make rapid progress and attain well. Outcomes in 2017 show that the proportion of pupils attaining higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 were mixed and sometimes below the national average. Again, these results were skewed by the low number of pupils taking the tests. However, you have correctly recognised that the most able pupils are not always challenged to reach their potential and, consequently, expectations of what these pupils can achieve need to be raised.
- You have introduced a range of effective support to help the most able pupils achieve well. Through staff training, you are challenging teachers to plan opportunities to encourage pupils to think creatively and learn in a variety of ways. During the inspection, we saw that in the most effective lessons, pupils were provided with open-ended tasks that motivated them to think for themselves and make their own choices. You acknowledge that this effective practice needs to be a more frequent feature of lessons across the school.
- When I met with a group of most-able pupils, they spoke enthusiastically about how teachers challenge them and help them to think deeply in most of their lessons. Work in their writing books demonstrates that they are given tasks that are suitably demanding for them. You acknowledge that there is scope to ensure that teachers always offer the right level of challenge in mathematics across all year groups and avoid providing repetitive work for the most able pupils to complete before moving them on to more demanding tasks.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the strongest teaching that exists within the school continues to be shared so that pupils' progress is accelerated further
- the most able pupils in key stage 1 are consistently challenged to reach the higher standards of which they are capable, particularly in 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 Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Webb
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

You and I discussed the lines of enquiry for this inspection, the school's internal evaluation of its performance, plans for future improvement, and information about current pupils' progress and attainment. Meetings were held with you and a group of your governors, including the chair of governors. I also spoke to the school's local authority improvement adviser on the telephone.

I gathered a range of evidence to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included joint observations with you of teaching and learning in all classes. We looked at a sample of pupils' current work across all subjects and across a wide range of abilities. I spoke informally to a number of pupils in classrooms about their learning, and met more formally with a group of pupils to talk about their school experience.

Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff and case studies about referrals made to external agencies. A discussion was held with you as the school's designated safeguarding lead. The views of 46 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account, as well as the 46 responses parents made using the free-text service. I also considered the 12 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey and the 44 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.