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Miss Amy White-Jones
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Miss White-Jones

Short inspection of Grendon Underwood Combined School

Following my visit to the school on 26 June 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 June 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Typically, pupils behave well, enjoy learning and make good progress. The school is a happy, caring place. Pupils look out for one another and know to treat others with respect, regardless of background or other difference.

Leaders have worked effectively to address areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Teaching of writing, including spelling, has improved. Typically, the most able pupils are provided with work of suitable challenge. Teaching in science has become a strength of the school. Leaders have also worked effectively to improve provision in early years. Leaders' success in securing these improvements makes them well placed to tackle some remaining variability in the quality of teaching. Rightly, leaders have identified the development of reasoning and problem-solving in mathematics in key stage 1 as a key area for further attention.

The headteacher left at the end of the spring term. An interim headteacher (a headteacher of another local school) is working with you for two days a week. Together with other senior leaders you are successfully steering the school through a potentially unsettling period. You have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Rightly, you are continuing to initiate improvements. This is helping ensure the school is in a good position for when the new headteacher takes up post in September.

Leaders know that communication with parents needed further attention. A few parents reported dissatisfaction about communication and voiced concerns about the way issues

were resolved under the previous headteacher's leadership. You have been working to rectify the situation. Some previously disgruntled parents are encouraged by the fresh approach. One reported dramatic improvements this term. Other comments such as, 'we are finally being listened to' and 'everyone seems happier' summed up parents renewed optimism. Nevertheless, a small number of parents are yet to be convinced. You recognise that further work is needed to win the confidence of these parents.

Leaders' and governors' understanding of the quality of teaching in subjects other than mathematics, English and science is not incisive. They know the curriculum is engaging. However, their knowledge of the extent to which the curriculum enables pupils to make strong progress in every subject is not consistently well developed.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that pupils are kept safe. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children are in place. Safeguarding is clearly everyone's responsibility. Effective training and updates consistently reinforce this message and ensure that all are alert to signs a pupil might be at risk. Staff record and pass on any concerns they have to one of the safeguarding leaders. Leaders keep a close eye on, and meticulously record, support provided for pupils who may be at risk. This includes keeping a 'watching brief' over pupils who might be vulnerable, swiftly providing extra support when needed. When engaging with other agencies, such as social services and the family resilience team, leaders work effectively to ensure that pupils and their families receive support that reduces any risk of harm. Leaders have placed a suitably high focus on ensuring that pupils learn how to stay safe online and in the world around them. Parents have also had the chance to benefit from online safety training.

Leaders and governors have made sure that safeguarding arrangements remain tight during a time of changing leadership. This term, you have stepped up successfully to the role of designated safeguarding leader (DSL) from your role as assistant DSL. The acting deputy headteacher has been fully trained and is assisting you effectively with this work.

Leaders actively seek ways to improve safeguarding even further. For example, you have minimised the risk of intrusion by tweaking the beginning and end-of-day procedures, and introducing a 'keep safe' day in response to feedback from pupils.

Pupils are clear the school is a safe place. They are confident they have someone to turn to for support when needed. Older pupils were keen to point out the recently introduced 'place to talk' room, where they know they can get help if needed. Weekly 'helping hands' group counselling sessions provide further useful support.

Inspection findings

- Pupils' progress in reading by the end of key stage 2 has improved notably in the last three years. In 2017, the progress of pupils with middle starting points was high. School information points to similar outcomes this summer.
- Pupils' progress in writing and spelling at key stage 2 has also improved. Leaders introduced a new approach to teaching writing two years ago. This, along with a much

higher focus on encouraging pupils to review and edit their work, has played a key part in raising achievement. School information and work in pupils' books shows that pupils, including the most able, typically tackle work of suitable challenge and make good progress. A notably higher proportion of pupils achieved a high standard in the end-of-key-stage-2 teacher assessments this summer than last year.

- The proportion of pupils reaching and exceeding the expected standard in the end-of-key-stage-2 grammar, punctuation and spelling tests has improved markedly. In 2016, outcomes were notably below those seen nationally. In 2017, outcomes were high. School information shows similarly positive outcomes this summer.
- Leaders have also focused successfully on improving children's progress in reading and writing in the early years. In the last two years, the proportion of children exceeding the expected standard in these areas of development declined considerably, having previously been high. Leaders of early years, one of whom joined the school last autumn, introduced a more coherent approach to teaching phonics and writing in Nursery and Reception. As a result, the most able children are now more suitably stretched. A notably increased proportion of children in Reception exceeded the early learning goals in reading and writing this year.
- Leaders recognise that teaching in mathematics at key stage 1 needs further attention. Typically, pupils make suitable progress in carrying out mathematical operations. However, pupils do not consistently have opportunities to develop their mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills. Consequently, pupils are not deepening their mathematical understanding and fluency as well as they could by the end of year 2.
- Leaders have strengthened teaching in science. Involvement in an external science training and development programme has proved useful. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are increasingly confident in teaching the subject. Pupils learn to work scientifically, making and reflecting on predictions. Harder questions encourage the most able to think more deeply.
- The science leader routinely monitors the quality of the science curriculum and ensures that it is increasingly effective. Leaders' monitoring and evaluation of subjects other than English, mathematics and science is not so well developed. As a result, leaders and governors are not in a strong position to identify priorities for improvement in these subjects and address them. This presents a barrier to leaders' and governors' ambition to move the school to outstanding.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching of mathematical reasoning and problem-solving at key stage 1 enables pupils to maximise their achievement in mathematics
- they gain a consistently incisive understanding of the quality of teaching in all subjects, so they can secure outstanding achievement across the curriculum
- communication with parents continues to improve so all are consistently confident that their concerns are dealt with effectively.

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

Yours sincerely

Diana Choulerton
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the interim headteacher, and the acting deputy headteacher at the start of the day. We discussed leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness and agreed the key areas we would focus on during the inspection. During the day, I held further discussions with you and other leaders. I met with six members of the governing body, including the chair and two vice-chairs. I also spoke with staff, pupils and parents. I made short visits to the Nursery and looked at Reception children's writing books with the leader for early years. I visited science lessons with the science leader to look at learning in science. I scrutinised a selection of pupils' work with you, the interim headteacher, and the acting deputy headteacher. I took account of 17 staff survey responses and 33 responses to the pupil survey. I also took account of 55 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 36 free-text responses. I had a short discussion by telephone with a representative from the local authority. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including leaders' checks on pupils' progress, and safeguarding records, policies and procedures.