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17 December 2018

Miss Beverley Jones
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Dear Miss Jones

Short inspection of Cotsford Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 4 December 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your team share a strong sense of moral purpose in your commitment to achieve the very best for all pupils and create a vibrant community where everyone is happy, safe and learning. This is underpinned by an ethos of high expectations where all teachers contribute to a culture of ongoing improvement.

You have decisively addressed areas for improvement from the previous inspection. For example, through very effective work on improving pupils' skills in reading, pupils are confident in analysing challenging texts, identifying evidence to support their responses and evaluating how effective authors are. As a result, at key stage 2 in 2018, pupils' attainment at the expected and higher standard in reading was above the national average. Pupils' ability to accurately use grammar in their own writing has been further developed as a result of carefully focused teaching in English. Teachers use a wide range of interactive approaches to the teaching of spelling and act as role models in the appropriate use of grammar and punctuation. Through developing the opportunities for staff to work together to share the high-

quality practice that is evident in school, you have ensured that teaching is at least good.

You, senior leaders and governors know the school well. Teaching and learning are kept continually under the spotlight through careful monitoring. Leaders are empowered to take full responsibility for their area of the school's curriculum, which has brought a fresh focus and energy to further improving teaching and learning. Professional development opportunities are highly valued by staff and used to continually support pupils' progress. There are many opportunities for the teachers to share their expertise and that of others to further develop the quality of teaching and learning. However, leaders acknowledge that in mathematics there is a need to further extend subject expertise, particularly around challenging higher-ability pupils. Staff spoken to feel valued by you and the governing body and are proud to work in Cotsford Junior School.

Pupils' progress is closely tracked and reviewed on a regular basis and summaries of progress are shared with governors. Regular moderation within school and with external partners lends an accuracy to school tracking information. Leaders and teachers know their pupils very well and progress reviews inform future improvement activities and interventions to support any pupil who is in danger of falling behind. Interventions are closely monitored and operate on a fluid and flexible basis, and you and your teachers are careful to ensure that these actions always have a positive effect on pupils' learning.

Pupils talk with enthusiasm about the broad variety of trips, visits, including residentials, and visitors that inspire them and enhance their learning opportunities. Striking displays of photographs illustrate the range of skills and challenges pupils have when taking part in these visits. Very well-presented books are a testament to the rich, extended-curriculum diet that pupils experience on a regular basis.

Your team's commitment to pupils' academic development is matched in their commitment to pupils' wider personal and social development. Pupils behave in a very positive way and show great care and concern for each other. This reflects you and your staff's high standards and expectations. Pupils understand that good behaviour is more than following rules; they see that it is about 'can-do' attitudes and having high aspirations. Every opportunity is taken to develop and extend pupils' life skills. For example, during the inspection a group of Year 5 pupils were being taught about healthy food choices through preparing and baking their own corned beef and vegetable pies. They were then very eager to get staff and visitors to test and evaluate them! You and your teachers work extremely well with outside agencies to provide appropriate support and guidance for families and their children. Pupils spoken to feel that their school is a family where everyone – adults and pupils – look after each other.

You have an experienced and committed team of governors who speak passionately about making sure that all pupils and their families are cared for and supported by

the school. The governing body is led by a highly skilled chair who brings a wide range of knowledge and experience that he uses to appropriately challenge you and your leadership team. Governors regularly and carefully review pupils' current progress to evaluate the effect of teaching, new initiatives and additional funding. They are very mindful of their safeguarding responsibilities and receive up-to-date training. Governors know the school and its community very well and are determined to ensure that all pupils receive the best education possible.

You, your team and governors engender a culture of mutual respect and tolerance where the uniqueness of every child is valued.

Safeguarding is effective.

The team responsible for safeguarding and child protection maintain a rigorous and constant focus on the welfare of pupils at all times. The school's safeguarding processes are of a very high standard and reflect a culture where actions to ensure pupils' safety run through everything the school does. Thorough checks are carried out on all staff working within school and visitors are carefully monitored. You and your team closely monitor all vulnerable pupils in school and support and guidance is provided quickly and effectively. Close links are maintained with outside agencies to ensure support for pupils' welfare. Staff are tenacious in following up concerns and ensuring that the right level of support is in place for pupils and their families.

Pupils feel safe and well supported in school. Pupils of all ages speak confidently about being able to approach any adult within school if they had any concerns or worries. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe online, both in school and at home. Through the curriculum and additional activities, pupils are given a good range of opportunities to explore their understanding of being safe and how they can keep each other safe.

Inspection findings

- Last academic year, by the end of Year 6, pupils' progress in writing was below the national average. You and your leadership team recognise the importance of writing and the need to increase the number of pupils who reach at least the expected standard and also greater depth. Leaders quickly identified those aspects of writing that pupils showed less confidence in and a range of approaches have been implemented to address them. In addition, the school is making very good use of the expertise and subject knowledge of the lead for English who is also a local authority moderator for writing.
- Pupils now have a greater number of opportunities to write at length across the curriculum in response to a wide range of stimulating experiences. For example, pupils visited Whitby to support their writing around 'Dracula'. Writing is closely linked to the challenging texts pupils are reading. Pupils are increasingly able to understand what makes an effective text, what the author has done to achieve

this and subsequently how they can transfer that knowledge into their written work. For example, pupils in Year 6 were able to compare how writers Marlorie Blackman and John Boyne conveyed a character's feelings and then decide which approach would be most effective in their own writing.

- Pupils develop strong writing skills and demonstrate accomplished writing in their workbooks over time. They have the ability to write effectively in a range of genres and their work is underpinned by strong standards in grammar, spelling and punctuation. Teachers teach an understanding of grammar and punctuation in creative and relevant contexts and this enables pupils to use these skills to considerable effect in their own writing. As a result, pupils across the school and particularly in Year 6, are currently making strong progress in their writing.
- Teachers have introduced new strategies to further improve the teaching in mathematics, particularly for higher-ability pupils. This has led to better progress being made currently by pupils across key stage 2. Pupils spoken to recognise that there is an increasingly higher level of challenge for all groups in mathematics, including more demanding problem-solving tasks.
- Pupils have numerous opportunities to consolidate their understanding of number and calculations. Teachers are enhancing this by providing increasing opportunities to develop pupils' reasoning skills, apply them to problem-solving tasks and explain their choices and methods. Adults make sure pupils get to use mathematical equipment to help them secure conceptual understanding.
- The leader for mathematics uses his very good subject knowledge to help teachers when identifying pupils' barriers to learning and also how to increasingly challenge higher-ability pupils. However, there is still a need for staff to further develop their subject skills in mathematics to make sure that all pupils are always supported appropriately.
- Work currently in pupils' books shows that by the end of key stage 2, the proportion of pupils working at the higher standard in mathematics is increasing due to the challenging tasks they are dealing with in lessons. However, leaders recognise that there is still a need for this proportion to increase further, especially as a result of improved outcomes for the higher-ability group of pupils.
- Pupils very clearly enjoy their mathematical learning and this is reflected in the positive attitudes shown in lessons.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the proportion of pupils working at the higher standard by the end of key stage 2 in mathematics increases, especially for the higher-ability group
- teachers' subject expertise in mathematics is further developed.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Vernon
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you and your senior leadership team. I held a meeting with a group of pupils and talked to pupils less formally in lessons. I met with two members of the governing body, including the chair. I also had a telephone conversation with the school improvement adviser from the local authority. I undertook a range of short visits to lessons with you. I listened to pupils from Year 6 read. I also looked at pupils' work in books. I examined a range of documents, including the school self-evaluation, assessment information, governors' minutes and pupil tracking information. I reviewed the school website. I examined safeguarding documents, including checks on the suitability of staff to work with children. I took account of three free-text responses from parents.