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Andrew Morris
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Dear Mr Morris

Short inspection of Potten End CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 25 May 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 the school was judged to be good in November 2010.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Despite a significant number of changes to the leadership and structure of the school, Potten End CofE Primary School remains a very purposeful place for children to learn, underpinned by strong and distinctive Christian values and ethos.

The provision for older pupils in the school ensures that they are very well prepared for their start at secondary school. This is the first year that you have the oldest Year 6 pupils since becoming a primary school in 2014. You have ensured that your high expectations for learning, and what young people of this age can achieve, are realised. The pupils clearly enjoy the well-planned learning opportunities on offer to them. They acquire and develop their skills quickly and make good progress across a range of subjects. Standards across the school remain high.

Much has been achieved since you have taken on the leadership of the school. Your vision and passion for improving the learning experiences of every individual is very evident. You have clearly focused on the correct priorities and are taking effective action to address areas of weakness. This is resulting in maintaining the high levels of attainment and progress for pupils.

Pupils are confident and self-assured. They are extremely polite and well-mannered with each other and with adults. Conduct around the school is exemplary, which results in a calm and orderly environment. Pupils and parents feel that leaders ensure that the school is a safe and very happy place.

Children start well in the early years classes. They settle quickly into the Nursery class and enjoy the rich variety of opportunities provided. Many of the children then continue through into the Reception class, which allows for a smooth transition into school life. The children are articulate and follow the school routines and expectations willingly. Most children start with skills and abilities that are expected for their age. They leave Reception well prepared for the challenges of Year 1, with an above-average proportion achieving a good level of development.

Your recent introduction of a rigorous assessment system ensures that you and your staff have an accurate view of the achievement of pupils who are currently on roll. You use this system to ensure that pupils in all classes make at least expected progress from their starting points. You know that pupils who have special educational needs or disability still require an even finer assessment system to evaluate their personal and academic achievement.

Governors have an accurate view of what is working well and what could be even better. Although some are new to their roles, including the chair of the governing body, they hold school leaders to account well for the progress that pupils make. Governors are committed and dedicated to ensuring that they fulfil their statutory duties.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's safeguarding policies and procedures meet current requirements. Recording systems are fully in place for the recruitment of staff. Governors are rigorous in ensuring that the necessary recruitment checks have been effectively carried out. Documents are meticulously kept.

Leaders and governors ensure that staff are well informed about new guidance including, for example, the 'Prevent' duty. Staff and governors receive regular training. The information on the school's website is compliant.

All pupils who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire, and those spoken to during the inspection, agreed that they feel safe and have someone to talk to if they are concerned. Parents overwhelmingly agree that their children are kept safe in the school. Pupils are highly confident that the adults at school will deal well with conflict or any potential bullying situations should they ever arise. Pupils commented 'teachers tell us how to keep safe'.

Inspection findings

- At the last inspection, inspectors praised the school for many aspects of its work, especially the very effective care, guidance and support and how the needs of individuals are identified and provided for. This has been maintained and remains a strength. Pupils who have special educational needs or disability receive the support and guidance they need to remove barriers to their learning both personally and academically.
- The few disadvantaged pupils receive personal and thoughtful provision so that they can make as much progress as their classmates. The governors understand how the additional money is used and praise the care that school leaders give to providing for individual needs. As a result, these pupils make rapid gains in their learning. Pupils' work in their books demonstrates that some are achieving the higher expectations for their age and closing the gap with their classmates.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent. In lessons, no time is wasted. Pupils are provided with interesting and stimulating topics so they can grapple with their work and practise their skills. For example, older pupils were observed editing and redrafting letters as they persuaded companies to donate money for children in another country with whom the school has close links. The purpose of writing was clear and pupils were fully engaged in making their writing the very best it could be. They were delighted with their results and the tangible success of their work.
- You have brought renewed energy and vision to school improvement since taking on the leadership of Potten End. You have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, you have appropriate action plans in place that you continue to evaluate against the progress that pupils are making. All the staff who responded to the online questionnaire are proud to work at the school and agree that the school is well led and managed.
- At the last inspection, the school was asked to improve the use of questioning in order to probe pupils' thinking and respond to their answers. This has been successfully achieved. Teachers provide clear explanations and strategies that are helpful. Their questioning allows pupils to discuss and practise reasoning skills. In mathematics, pupils of different abilities were thoroughly engaged in applying a formula for using algebra. The most able pupils were discussing the questions they had been given, relishing the choice and time to work at a level that deepened their knowledge and understanding.
- You recognise that attendance had dipped recently and have already put systems and procedures in place to address poor attendance or persistent absenteeism. You use supportive measures and build good relations with parents to ensure that pupils develop good habits for attending school. The vast majority of pupils rarely miss a day at school, and are rewarded for their regularity. Therefore, attendance overall is improving and is currently in line with national averages.
- In the early years classes, children start well. They are well cared for and happy in a safe and secure environment. Adults provide for children's social

and emotional needs well. Through your checks on the progress children are making, you have identified that the children at Potten End can achieve even more in writing. You have recently sought and acted on external advice and training to ensure that children receive interesting and stimulating opportunities to develop their skills. As a result, the high levels of achievement in the early years are set to continue.

- The younger children in the school are very proud of their friendships with their 'buddies' in Year 4. At lunchtimes, the Year 4 pupils carry out their responsibilities thoughtfully, ensuring that their young friends adopt good table manners and enjoy chatting and social interaction. One child commented, 'I like my buddy because she helps me and is my friend.' These less structured times are very positive. Good humour and friendships are very evident.
- Pupils are enthusiastic about the opportunities you offer in terms of extra-curricular activities. Opportunities such as the 'press gang club' and cookery clubs are very well attended. Through encouraging pupils to participate in competitions, you ensure that individuals achieve personal success.
- During this year, where the use of national levels of progress has changed, you have introduced a new and rigorous system to track pupils' achievement. You and your teachers use this system regularly to ensure that individuals make the progress of which they are capable. You are aware that this system is not yet fine-tuned enough to measure the smaller steps of progress for those pupils who have special educational needs or disability. As the proportion of pupils who have additional needs continues to change as the school grows, this remains a priority.
- You and your acting deputy headteacher are successfully ensuring that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. However, you have rightly identified that, in some areas of the curriculum for which they are responsible, middle leaders are not sufficiently skilled in evaluating the progress pupils make.
- The governors are committed and dedicated to ensuring the continued success of Potten End CofE Primary School. Through attending additional training sessions, new governors are quickly becoming skilled and confident in performing their statutory duties, and provide strategic direction for the school. They visit the school frequently to assure themselves that the information they receive is appropriate. The minutes of their meetings demonstrate that they ask challenging questions of school leaders so that they can hold them to account for the progress the school is making. Governance is strong and the governing body demonstrates the capacity to continue to move the school forward.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- middle leaders who have responsibility for areas of the curriculum are fully effective in monitoring and evaluating the progress pupils make

- children have even more opportunities to develop their writing skills in the early years classes, so that more of them achieve at least the expected standard by the end of Reception
- the small steps of progress made by pupils with specific additional needs are carefully tracked and monitored to enable full evaluation of their personal and academic progress.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of St Albans and the director of children's services for Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your acting deputy headteacher, governors, including the chair of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority. I jointly observed learning in most classes with you, to consider the quality of teaching over time and the progress pupils are making. I spent time speaking formally and informally with pupils and observed them at play and during lunchtime. I reviewed school documents about safeguarding, including the record of checks on the suitability of each member of staff to work with young people, pupils' attendance, school self-evaluation and improvement plans. I considered 83 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, including 24 free text responses. I considered the views of the 20 staff and 83 pupils who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaires.