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Mrs Isabel Stubbs
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Dear Mrs Stubbs

Short inspection of Cecil Gowing Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 May 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

Cecil Gowing Infant School is the caring heart of the community it serves. Pupils love coming to school because they know they are valued and safe and will enjoy learning. The school brings to life its strap line of 'inspiring imaginations' because you and senior leaders are passionate about making learning meaningful and fun. The innovative and dynamic outdoor learning sessions involve all pupils in mixed-age groups taking part in a wide range of stimulating activities. These include den building, pond dipping and archery. Younger children mix readily with older pupils and all are fully included. Parents and carers who spoke to me were full of praise for the school's work and how approachable they find staff. Parents of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities said how well their children's needs were met and how easy they found it to discuss their progress with staff.

Staff know the pupils very well as individuals and carefully track their progress. They ensure that most pupils make strong progress; they act swiftly to support any who are at risk of falling behind. Much has been done to tackle areas to improve raised at the previous inspection. Subject leaders are more involved in monitoring the quality of the provision. Some, such as the leader for early years and the leader for outdoor learning, are an inspiration to their colleagues.

Phonics teaching has improved and a greater proportion of pupils are reaching the required standard in Year 1.

Leaders have focused on challenging the most able pupils. This is beginning to bear fruit in the early years, where in past years too few pupils left Reception exceeding expectations. A high proportion of Year 2 pupils reached greater depth in reading in 2017. The proportions of pupils attaining greater depth in writing and mathematics were also above average. However, the quality and quantity of the current Year 2 pupils' work in foundation subjects are not as good as they could be. Sometimes the work is not demanding enough for the most able pupils, and they do not make the progress they should. Pupils do not explore some subjects, such as history and religious education, in sufficient depth.

Governors support and challenge the school effectively and hold leaders to account for standards and the way the budget is spent. Governors are dedicated to the school's work, visit regularly and focus on how well leaders are tackling the school's priorities for improvement.

Pupils are polite and very well behaved. Their great enjoyment of school is reflected in their above-average attendance. In class they listen well and work hard. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress because they receive support that is tailored well to their individual needs. Additional adults are skilled at giving them the help they need.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that the school's single central record of employment checks is complete and up to date. They keep careful records of any safeguarding concerns. Staff are fully trained and given regular updates and quizzes to keep their knowledge and understanding fresh. This builds a strong culture of safeguarding. Pupils said they feel safe in school, a view supported by their parents. Pupils look out for one another and older pupils help the younger ones. The school works closely with families and outside agencies to keep pupils safe.

Inspection findings

- In order to make sure the school remains good, I identified a number of key lines of enquiry that we agreed at our initial meeting. First of all, we considered what leaders are doing to ensure that more children exceed expectations in the early years. In previous years, fewer than five pupils were leaving Reception exceeding expectations in reading, writing or mathematics.
- The early years leader has identified this as something to improve and has focused training and support on meeting the needs of the most able children. For example, staff have had training in asking more probing questions. Approaches to teaching have changed, with an emphasis on group tasks that challenge the most able. The most able children are also given demanding tasks in phonics to allow them to apply their skills. Staff focus on how individuals are doing each week and discuss their findings with parents.

- The progress of the most able pupils is tracked and the school's data shows that they are doing very well this year. An increasing proportion of children are likely to be exceeding expectations by the end of the year.
- Next, we considered what you are doing to ensure that pupils have the skills they need in phonics. This was because the teaching of phonics was an area to improve at the previous inspection.
- Following the previous inspection, the school changed its approach to teaching phonics to make sure that all pupils were learning at a phase appropriate for their age. This ensured that they were taught the sounds they needed to know in time for the Year 1 screening check. All staff received training in phonics and their subject knowledge improved. Leaders monitored the quality of the provision closely. They introduced interventions for pupils who were not making sufficient progress. They also added more suitable books to the library that enabled pupils to practise their phonics skills. As a result of these changes, phonics scores increased in 2017 to broadly average.
- We saw that phonics is taught well in Reception and Year 1. Year 2 pupils who read to me used their phonics skills effectively and understood what they were reading.
- Finally, we considered what the school is doing well to ensure that so many pupils reach greater depth in reading by the end of Year 2. In both 2016 and 2017, over half of the pupils reached greater depth in reading, which was well above the national average.
- Leaders have developed approaches to reading that have proven successful in enabling pupils to reach greater depth. They ensure that every pupil reads to an adult every week. They focus on comprehension skills. In Reception, children have shared reading sessions with a high-quality text and are exposed to good writing from the start. The school's centrally located library is very attractive. Features such as 'author of the month', which pupils organise, draw attention to particular writers. Pupils receive rewards for regularly reading at home. The school places a great emphasis on improving pupils' vocabulary. Teachers' assessments are moderated with teachers from the feeder junior school.
- As a result of the consistent application of these measures, the proportion of pupils on track to reach greater depth is high again this year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quantity and quality of the work of Year 2 pupils in foundation subjects improve, especially of the most able pupils
- early years staff secure changes to the provision for the most able children to ensure that the proportions exceeding expectations in reading, writing and mathematics improve by the end of the Reception Year.

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

Yours sincerely

Nick Butt
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other school leaders, four governors, including the chair, and pupils. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. We visited all classrooms and, in the afternoon, had a tour of the outdoor learning activities with the outdoor learning leader. I examined a range of documents, policies and assessment information. I considered 64 responses from parents to Ofsted's questionnaire, Parent View, and 51 free-text responses. I spoke to parents in the playground before school. I also considered 28 responses to the staff survey.