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Mr Paul Essenhigh
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Dear Mr Essenhigh

Short inspection of Catshill First School

Following my visit to the school on 16 May 2017, 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have strengthened your team and this has had a significant impact on improvements to the school and outcomes for pupils. You foster leadership at all levels. Staff who responded to the questionnaire agreed unanimously that the school is much improved since the last inspection. Staff know that you have raised expectations. You and your skilled team support staff to improve their practice through professional development, coaching and mentoring.

Governance is strong. The governing body is skilled and it provides a high level of challenge to leaders, balanced with the right level of support. Governors know the priorities for the school so that it can improve further. They are regular visitors to the school. This allows them to see for themselves strengths and improvements in practice and identify areas for further development. For example, they spend time with leaders looking at pupils' work to see the progress in writing.

Parents talk about Catshill First School in glowing terms. Staff are described as approachable, supportive and caring. Parents say that they feel their children are safe in school and pupils agree. One parent summed up the views of many others, describing the school as 'a truly nurturing and caring environment where children are treated as individuals'. Learning is fun at this school and pupils say they enjoy their learning.

Since the last inspection, leaders have continued to focus on speeding up pupils' progress in writing. You and your team have introduced a range of different ways to help pupils develop their skills in writing. This is now having an impact on the quality of written work across the school. As a result, leaders are seeing better progress in writing overall.

The second area of focus since the last inspection has been on making sure that teaching extends or deepens pupils' knowledge and understanding. Leaders have worked with determination to make sure that standards of teaching have improved. This has resulted in better outcomes for pupils. At the end of Year 2 in 2016, a higher-than-average proportion of pupils achieved standards of greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics. However, this achievement is not yet consistent for all groups of pupils. While disadvantaged pupils achieved standards of greater depth in line with similar groups nationally, fewer pupils did as well in mathematics. In writing, no disadvantaged pupils achieved greater depth in their learning.

As standards in teaching have improved since the last inspection, so has teachers' questioning of pupils to check their understanding. This means that teachers and other adults are better at making sure that learning is matched to pupils' abilities. The inspector saw staff questioning pupils skilfully across all year groups. For example, adults asked children in the Reception class to describe their super-minibeasts they had created. This allowed adults to check children's understanding of words they were using, such as camouflage. In another lesson, pupils in key stage 2 had to analyse a teacher's piece of writing. They were able to identify correct use of punctuation and grammar, and correct spelling mistakes.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your team put children and pupils first. Pupils told the inspector that they feel safe at school and this view is shared by parents and staff. Leaders' high standards of safeguarding practice are woven into daily routines. Pupils' safety is a priority, shared by everyone at Catshill First School.

Governors and leaders understand their statutory responsibilities. They make sure that staff receive regular safeguarding training to help them support pupils well. New members of staff are trained in a timely way and visitors receive clear information about their role in keeping pupils safe. Adults are in no doubt about how to report any concerns about pupils, should they have them. The designated safeguarding lead and the team of deputies make sure that case files are well maintained, and referrals are made in a timely way. Your recording systems show how you follow up decisions made by outside agencies tenaciously if you do not believe decisions have been made in the child's best interests.

The school site is safe and secure and welfare requirements are met in the early years foundation stage. Pupils are confident in talking about how they keep themselves safe. This includes keeping gates locked in the school and looking after themselves when using the internet. All pupils have to sign an acceptable use policy for using the internet. This means that pupils understand internet safety rules. Pupil

representatives from the values council were able to talk about possible dangers when using social media. Even though the group to whom the inspector talked said they did not use the internet without supervision, they recognised the risks and could talk about what they would do to keep themselves safe.

Inspection findings

- Leaders' in-depth analysis of previous outcomes for groups of pupils has enabled them to target support and tailor interventions. Leaders are making sure that differences in performance between groups of pupils are being diminished. Leaders have identified, through their own accurate self-evaluation of the school, that the previous performance of boys and disadvantaged pupils has not been as good as that of other groups in writing. Staff also have a clear understanding of the historical difference in performance of these two groups of pupils. They make sure that they tailor their planning and teaching to address this.
- As a result of these actions, leaders have transformed the approach to writing in school. Opportunities to write begin as soon as children start school. Nursery and Reception class staff provide varied and frequent opportunities for children to practise their writing skills. These skills are further supported by pupils' confident use of their phonic skills. For example, children were talking about their super-minibeasts, then writing down the adjectives they were using to describe them. They were confident to attempt to spell words such as symmetrical. Older pupils are given frequent opportunities to write at length and are expected to check that they maintain standards of punctuation and grammar in their work. The inspector saw pupils in key stage 2 reviewing each other's writing to suggest improvements, before developing their own stories further using an exciting range of vocabulary.
- Leaders' rigorous monitoring systems enable them to identify where practice in the teaching of writing may be less consistent. Leaders observe teachers regularly, carry out learning walks and look at pupils' work in their books. Leaders recognise that while teaching has improved overall, some inconsistencies still remain. For example, pupils are sometimes not being challenged enough to deepen their learning.
- Current progress information shows that these approaches are having a positive impact on standards in writing for groups of pupils. Disadvantaged pupils are now outperforming non-disadvantaged pupils in writing in Years 1 and 3. In Reception and Year 2, the gaps are closing rapidly for boys and disadvantaged pupils. There is still work to be done on closing the gap for boys' writing in Year 1 and boys and disadvantaged pupils in Year 4. Leaders know this and continue to take steps to address these gaps.
- Leaders have introduced pupil progress meetings this academic year. These allow leaders and staff to have robust discussions about pupils' learning and development. These conversations also take into account pupils' social and emotional development, their behaviour and level of attendance. This information provides an accurate picture of any additional support from which individual pupils may benefit. Two leaders are trained local authority moderators which enables them to make sure that judgements about pupils' achievements are

checked and compared with work of a similar standard. As a result of this approach, pupils are now receiving the right level of support they need to help them move on to their next steps of learning. Leaders know that there is a high level of mobility at Catshill First School and pupils move in and out of the area at different times of the year. Yet this is a school where excuses are not accepted. Your expectation of high standards is clear. While staff know that some pupils will come to school with gaps in their learning, pupil progress meetings focus everyone on making sure that these gaps are addressed quickly.

- Leaders, including the early years leader, assess children accurately on entry to school. Children enter the early years from a range of different starting points and teachers make sure that they know what children can do and what their next steps of learning are. The rich variety of indoor and outdoor learning activities in Nursery and Reception, including the 'imagination station' cover all areas of the early years foundation stage curriculum. Children are proud of their work and are keen to talk about their learning. They show a good level of resilience when taking part in activities, seeing them through from beginning to end. The staff in the early years know the children well and the early years leader makes sure that children who are on track to exceed their early learning goals are given even more challenge in their learning. Staff design activities to engage all children, including the high proportion of boys who are currently in Reception.
- Leaders and governors make sure that the high proportion of disadvantaged pupils who attend Catshill First School are supported well. Leaders and governors are using pupil premium funding effectively to make sure that this large group of pupils is given the right support. This includes nurturing support and interventions to help them with their learning. Leaders use accurate assessment information to identify particular year groups which may need more support, or specific curriculum areas which need extra attention. For example, the school's summer reading challenge revealed that fewer disadvantaged pupils were reading books than their non-disadvantaged peers. Leaders took the opportunity to arrange regular visits for pupils and parents to Catshill Middle School's library. They were also able to visit a bookshop on behalf of the library to buy extra library books for pupils to read. As a result, disadvantaged pupils are now more engaged in reading.
- Progress is now improving rapidly for disadvantaged pupils. Disadvantaged pupils are now outperforming non-disadvantaged pupils in mathematics in Year 1, and in Year 2, gaps in reading, writing and mathematics are closing. In Year 3, disadvantaged pupils are outperforming non-disadvantaged pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. This is also the case for Year 4 pupils in mathematics. However, not enough disadvantaged pupils achieve greater depth in their learning.
- Over a quarter of disadvantaged pupils require additional support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities. Progress meetings have coordinated all support for pupils, including those with additional needs. Leaders have worked closely with a local teaching alliance school to source additional training support for staff and advice about pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, pupils receive personalised support appropriate to their needs. Progress information shows that the majority of these pupils are making

accelerated progress or are achieving age-related expectations.

- All staff work together to promote regular attendance at school. Leaders recognise that current rates of attendance are still not as high as they would like them to be. All staff work hard to encourage pupils to attend regularly by providing engaging lessons and extra-curricular activities. When pupils are not in school, staff follow up absences swiftly. Steps taken to improve attendance include home visits, targeted breakfast clubs, celebrating good attendance in letters home and taking more serious action including school penalty notices. Support from the local authority to address these issues has been lacking in the past, but a newly appointed education welfare officer is now engaging with the school to provide extra support and challenge.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- recent improvements in progress for disadvantaged pupils are continued and sustained so that this group achieve outcomes in line with age-related expectations
- the quality of teaching is improved further so that pupils are challenged consistently to achieve greater depth in their learning
- they continue the drive to improve attendance so that the school's overall figure is in line with the national average.

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

Yours sincerely

Deb Jenkins
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and your leadership team to discuss progress since the last inspection, your school's self-evaluation, development plan and agree key lines of enquiry. In order to explore these areas further, I:

- met with the safeguarding manager and members of the governing body
- met with the school's business manager to review the school's single central record, including sampling of personnel files
- met with parents at the beginning of the school day to discuss their views of the school, reviewed the 18 free-text responses to the online parent survey, one

letter from a parent, the school's own recent parent survey and 45 responses on Parent View, Ofsted's online parent survey; I also took account of 21 survey responses from staff

- spoke to pupils informally about the school and met with representatives from the values council and took account of 19 online responses from pupils
- scrutinised a range of school documents, including: the school's self-evaluation document and development plan; performance and assessment information; and safeguarding documents, including child protection files, local authority referrals, care plans, risk assessments and training records
- conducted a learning walk in the early years foundation stage, key stage 1 and key stage 2 across the school, accompanied by senior leaders
- carried out a work scrutiny with senior leaders
- spoke to the school's previous school improvement adviser by telephone
- looked at information on the school's website.