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Mrs Josephine Reid
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Dear Mrs Reid

Short inspection of Frieth Church of England Combined School

Following my visit to the school on 26 April 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 October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You provide drive, vision and inspirational leadership which is recognised and highly valued by staff, pupils and parents. Together, you, your staff and governors form a strong team who are passionate to improve the quality of provision at Frieth and ambitious for the pupils in your care. Pupils and their parents were effusive in their praise for the school and are rightly proud of all that it achieves. As one parent commented, 'We had really high hopes for this school and Frieth has exceeded our expectations.'

Frieth is a small rural school which offers a very warm, nurturing and inclusive community atmosphere. Pupils are articulate, confident and display excellent attitudes towards learning, their school and each other. Children are prepared well for life in modern Britain and speak confidently and knowledgeably about different faiths and cultures, recognising diversity and valuing equality.

In lessons pupils apply themselves conscientiously to the tasks they are given and take pride in making their work the best it can be. Very good relationships, together with calm and productive working environments, support pupils to make good progress. There is a well-planned creative curriculum, together with a wealth of additional clubs and activities. From the early years onwards the habits of good learning are established and pupils thrive. One parent spoke for many when they commented:

'Frieth gives children confidence, knowledge and a sense of responsibility for others that I think is unique and wonderful. There are a wide range of extra-curricular options available, and my child enjoys school choir, golf, street dance and cricket.'

Cohorts at the school are often very small. This means that there can be variability in each year group and, therefore, caution is needed when making comparisons to national averages. Yet, historical progress information over time indicates that reading and writing skills are strong but that mathematics outcomes dipped slightly in 2016. For pupils currently in the school, your improved assessment, together with specialist training, has enabled teachers to improve learning in mathematics this year. During our visits to lessons we saw pupils confidently discussing alternative methods of solving mathematical problems and teaching which promoted thinking skills. You are aware that these improvements in mathematics are ongoing and that more could be done to ensure that a greater proportion of the most able pupils achieve the highest standards in science and the wider curriculum.

Regular visits to school together with your detailed reports ensure that governors have a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Your very thorough development plans have clear targets and are appropriately focused. By promoting distributed responsibility for developing key aspects of the school's work you have successfully fostered a strong team atmosphere with your staff. Consequently, standards are improving and all groups of current pupils, including the most vulnerable, are making good progress.

Leaders and governors have responded particularly well to the areas for improvement identified during the previous inspection. You work well in partnership with other local schools and make good use of consultants and advice from the diocese and local authority. This enables you to actively seek and evaluate new initiatives and teaching approaches, implementing only those methods which would be most effective in your school. As a result, more sharply focused lessons and improved teaching have led to better outcomes for all groups of pupils across the school, particularly in reading and writing. Mathematics is improving rapidly. Staff morale is high.

Safeguarding is effective.

Very nearly all parents, staff and pupils who responded to the surveys believe that pupils are safe, well looked after and happy in school. You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that there is a culture of vigilance. Records are well maintained, detailed and of high quality. There are clear, well-understood systems in place to manage safeguarding requirements. All staff have up-to-date training to an appropriate level so they know what to do should they be worried about a pupil. Governors are knowledgeable about safeguarding and ensure that this aspect of staff's work is given high priority. The school's new website is professional, up-to-date, meets the government's requirements and contains useful information for parents relating to safeguarding and keeping children safe online.

You, and other staff, are highly visible, especially at the beginning of the day. Parents told me that they appreciate these informal opportunities to talk to you and to raise any concerns if necessary. Records for individual pupils show that systems to raise and record concerns are secure and that you diligently ensure appropriate involvement and liaison with outside agencies when necessary. Pupils take a pride in supporting each other and are confident that the adults in school will help them if they have any concerns. Pupils' conduct in lessons and around the site is exemplary and there are no concerns about bullying. Incidents of poor behaviour are very rare. There are high levels of supervision at playtimes and lunchtime. Playtimes are well ordered and organised so that pupils play safely and enjoyably. Pupils enjoy school and attendance is above average.

Inspection findings

- During this visit, as well as evaluating safeguarding arrangements, I focused on specific aspects of the school's provision, including:
 - the progress pupils make in Reception and Year 1
 - whether the dip in the 2016 key stage 2 results is indicative of current pupils' progress in mathematics
 - the quality of learning in the wider curriculum
 - how effectively the school meets the needs of specific groups, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Leaders and governors have worked hard to improve the quality of provision in the Reception/Year 1 class and are rightly proud of the newly opened and greatly improved outdoor learning area. Children gain confidence from their good relationships with staff and collaborative play with others in their class. They make good progress and develop communication, literacy and mathematical skills that prepare them well for key stage 1. Leaders recognise that the next steps of development for the new outdoor area includes clearer zoning and a sharper focus on reading, writing and particularly counting skills.
- Strong teaching with a clear focus on phonics underpins the good progress that pupils make in reading. High proportions of pupils achieve the expected standard in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 and nearly all pupils do so by the end of Year 2. In 2016, the proportions of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading and writing at the end of Year 2 were above average but slightly below average in mathematics. The proportion of those working at a greater depth in all three areas was in line with national figures.
- You have responded well to the dip in Year 6 pupils' achievement in mathematics last year to arrange a comprehensive package of teacher training and support involving outside consultants and liaison with other schools. As a result, the teaching of mathematics in key stage 2 is improving rapidly and there is a clear whole-school focus on improving pupils' verbal reasoning and problem-solving skills. Leaders are aware that there is still more to do to embed this level of challenge into pupils' written work in mathematics to ensure that the most able pupils are fully stretched.

- You work collaboratively with other local schools to support teachers' professional development and improve the quality of teaching across the school. In addition, the curriculum is enriched by a wide diversity of popular sporting and artistic clubs, trips and visits which are valued by pupils and parents. However, pupils' books show that not all teachers' expectations are as consistently high in science and the wider curriculum as they are in English and mathematics. Pupils, particularly the most able pupils in key stage 2, are not set sufficiently challenging tasks which require them to apply their writing skills in science and the humanities. Consequently, progress is not yet as strong across the curriculum as it is in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The small numbers of disadvantaged or vulnerable pupils, together with pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are offered bespoke support that is well-matched to their particular needs. Their progress and welfare are routinely reviewed. Good relationships ensure that teachers and teaching assistants are very effective at supporting these and other pupils in class, so that all can participate fully in lessons. As a result, all pupils are making strong progress over time.
- Historically, overall attendance has been in line with or slightly above national figures and this continues to be the case. Pupils, parents and governors value the very effective support offered to vulnerable pupils by yourself and your team. Together you have ensured that the small cohort of pupils with high persistent absence figures have attended more regularly this year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the learning environment for the early years is further improved with a wider range of stimuli for mathematics and literacy development
- progress in mathematics continues to improve in key stages 1 and 2
- the quality of pupils' work and their depth of learning in science and the wider curriculum are improved, by giving more challenging activities which involve pupils in applying their literacy and numeracy skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Matthew Newberry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the leader of key stage 2, teachers, members of the governing body and a representative of the diocese. I visited all of the classes jointly with yourself to look at teaching and learning. I also looked at pupils' work in their exercise books. I observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime and around the school, had a meeting with a small group of pupils and considered 51 responses to the pupil survey. I also took into account 13 responses to the staff survey and 39 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, as well as speaking to a number of parents at the beginning of the day. I evaluated a range of documents, including pupils' progress information, attendance figures and safeguarding policies, procedures and checks.