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Ms Elise Redman
Head of School
Christow Primary School
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Dear Ms Redman

Short inspection of Christow Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 September 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. The executive principal officer of the Education South West multi-academy trust and the executive headteacher support you well. Since your substantive appointment in February 2018, you have worked well with new and existing leaders, including governors. This has enabled you to bring the school through a difficult period of strategic and operational change. You have successfully stabilised staffing and ensured that whole-school training and leadership support have resulted in continual improvement.

You, your senior leadership team and governors hold a strong and principled belief that every child deserves the best start at school. Christow offers every opportunity for pupils to achieve well, whatever their circumstances or needs, 'building a love of learning', as the school motto explains. You have the confidence of staff, pupils and parents and have established an open, caring and inclusive school community where everyone is valued. As one parent highlighted, 'Children are rewarded and acknowledged and made to feel special no matter how small the achievement.' Nearly all the parents who responded to the online inspection survey would highly recommend this school to other parents.

The school's caring and nurturing ethos is demonstrated by pupils' positive relationships. This view is confirmed by parents. Parents' comments on Parent View typically value the 'positive, kind and encouraging staff', with one parent explaining how 'Christow staff and pupils have made us all feel so welcome from the start.'

Pupils are kind and considerate towards each other and adults. Older pupils are supportive of younger ones and are sensitive to others' needs. They are polite and well mannered.

Standards have improved in many areas since your appointment. Your relentless drive to improve the school is ably supported by your current middle leaders. For example, you collectively identified that pupils' weak phonics skills were holding back their ability to write effectively. Your leadership to bring about improvement in the teaching of phonics was highly effective. You ensured that staff are trained to teach phonic knowledge and skills effectively as a priority. Pupils' phonics skills improved and the proportion meeting the expected standard is now well above the national average. However, the outcomes in writing in the early years and key stage 1 have not yet reflected the improvement in pupils' phonics skills. The proportion of key stage 1 pupils attaining the expected standard in writing is below the national average.

The areas for improvement in the previous inspection report have been successfully addressed. By Year 6, pupils' work, including that of the most able pupils, shows they confidently transfer skills learned in their English lessons to their written work in other subjects. For example, they write lists, reports and instructions in science and extended narrative texts in history and geography. They have opportunities to write at length in English lessons in a range of genres that provide a real-life context for writing, such as letters. Pupils enjoy writing stories and solving problems in mathematics and love to challenge themselves each day. For example, pupils in Year 6 said they liked to choose the medium, hot or extreme 'chilli challenge' when attempting mathematics problems. Pupils' responses illustrate their keenness to improve. Pupils achieve well in the end-of-key-stage-2 tests and are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Safeguarding is effective.

The multi-academy trust, alongside the leadership team, has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a positive safeguarding culture across the school. Records of recruitment, training and issues of child protection are detailed and of high quality. Staff receive regular and up-to-date training on how to keep pupils safe from abuse, sexual exploitation, and the influence of radicalisation and extremism. You liaise well with external agencies, when appropriate, so that pupils get the extra care that they need.

Leaders have responded effectively to the school's health and safety audit to ensure pupils are kept safe at all times while on the school site. Nearly all parents who responded to the online survey agreed that the school keeps their children safe.

All the pupils I spoke with told me they feel safe in school and that bullying is rare. They said they would have no hesitation in speaking to a member of staff if they had concerns. They know these concerns would be treated with sensitivity by staff. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online as teachers 'talk about it a lot'.

Inspection findings

- At the beginning of this inspection we agreed on the lines of enquiry to consider during the day. We discussed the progress you had made in improving the outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check. As the outcomes for pupils in phonics had not been as good as expected nationally for the previous two years, you quickly identified that the school systems in place to teach phonics effectively needed to improve significantly.
- You use expertise within the trust to train staff and sharpen their phonics teaching skills. You ensure that appropriately trained staff support those pupils who find learning letters and sounds difficult because of their additional needs. Staff evaluate pupils' learning carefully and systematically at each step.
- You rightly recognised that opportunities for pupils to write letters and words after practising the sounds they make were too limited. Pupils are now taught at a level that is specifically designed to meet their needs and fill any gaps in their learning. Staff teach phonics in a more systematic and focused way. Ninety per cent of pupils in Year 1 met the expected standard in the phonics screening check in 2018. This figure is above the national average.
- Next, we looked at how leaders ensure that mathematics outcomes are more consistent across key stages. This is particularly important as numbers in these small cohorts change significantly as they move through the school. Leaders effectively identify gaps in pupils' mathematical knowledge. Leaders provide pupils with additional support to fill these gaps in learning. Leaders systematically build on strengths in teaching. They further develop the school ethos of high expectations of both pupils and teachers.
- Teachers expect pupils to work hard in mathematics. Pupils say they enjoy challenges and choose to work on solving the most difficult problems they can as a matter of course. Teachers identify the most able pupils at a very early stage. They set work of a high standard for them. Work in books shows that pupils make good progress. Teachers' moderation of their assessments of pupils' work across the trust ensures that standards remain high. Mathematics teaching is consistently good across the school.
- Finally, we looked at how leaders ensure high-quality writing across the school, in all subjects. The outcomes for the end-of-key-stage-2 tests in 2018 were positive, with a high proportion of pupils achieving the higher standard. English grammar, punctuation and spelling is a clear strength of the school, with 100% of pupils attaining the expected standard at the end of Year 6 in 2018. However, pupils' attainment in writing at the end of key stage 1 has been lower than the national average for two years. No children achieved the higher standard in the early years or key stage 1 in writing. While some pupils' starting points were low and progress is clearly evident in books, attainment in writing was significantly lower than the national average at the end of key stage 1 in 2018.
- You have been working diligently to address this trend. You have introduced initiatives to improve writing across the school. For example, topics are specifically chosen to engage boys in writing. Boys told me they enjoyed writing

stories. Teachers provide children with a wide range of opportunities in the early years to engage in mark making and writing as soon as they start school.

- Staff work together successfully across the trust to support pupils' learning and think creatively about how to improve their attainment in writing. 'Writing challenges' are held during the summer holidays to encourage pupils to practise their writing skills. Work in pupils' books shows that key stage 1 pupils are beginning to write in a range of genres and produce high-quality, edited pieces of writing.

Next steps for the school

- Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that the attainment of pupils in key stage 1 rises, by reinforcing recently introduced strategies, particularly in writing.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the executive headteacher and chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Devon. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Julie Jane
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with you, the executive headteacher and the executive principal of the Education South West multi-academy trust. I held meetings with leaders responsible for early years and literacy. I spoke with a group of pupils and individual pupils around the school. I held a meeting with governors.

We made visits to lessons to observe pupils' learning and to scrutinise their work. I evaluated pupils' workbooks in detail with you and the executive headteacher. I considered a range of documentary evidence, which included the school's self-evaluation, development plans and school performance information. I looked at behaviour and safeguarding documentation and your analysis of attendance and evaluated the safety of the school site. I took account of 41 responses to the Parent View online survey.