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Dear Mrs Richards

Short inspection of Steeple Claydon Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 11 June 2019, 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 July 2015.

Based on the evidence available during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness of good as a result of this inspection.**

The school has undergone significant change since the previous inspection. Both you and your deputy headteacher are new to post and you are working tirelessly to achieve your vision for an inclusive and successful school, 'giving every child a chance to shine'. Your combined efforts have been successful in ensuring that most pupils make good progress and in ensuring better provision for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.

Your governing body is experienced and dedicated. It offers you effective support. Governors are ambitious for the school and have a clear understanding of the strategic role they play. They know the school well and share the commitment of you and your staff to provide a broad, balanced and engaging curriculum. However, all leaders rightly acknowledge that there is much work to be done to further improve the curriculum that is offered to Steeple Claydon's pupils.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and are enthusiastic about the family feel of a small school where everyone knows each other. They appreciate the large field and the opportunities this offers them to play football as well as the wide range of clubs that are available to them, such as basketball, badminton and African drumming.

This positive view of the school is strongly supported by the vast majority of

parents. Every parent I spoke to praised the school for its pastoral care of their children. One parent of a pupil, currently in the nursery, told me that their child had been shy and nervous but, through the high quality of care, was now confident and loved coming to school. Typically parents say their children are happy at Steeple Claydon and enjoy coming to school. Parents say they are given useful information about their children's progress and almost every parent would recommend the school to others.

At the end of the previous inspection the inspector reported that pupils' attendance should be improved. As a result of your work to build good relationships with families and support them in ensuring that their children attend school regularly, attendance has risen to above the national average and the number of children missing school regularly has fallen.

The previous inspector also noted a need to ensure that the most able pupils receive a sufficient level of challenge in all subject areas. In English and mathematics, this need has been met. The proportions of pupils achieving the higher standards, at the end of both key stages, is well above the national averages. However, the wider curriculum does not provide a sufficient level of challenge and leaders have rightly identified this as an area for continuing improvement.

In the early years and key stage 1, pupils thrive and make consistently good progress, attaining standards that are consistently above the national averages. However, leaders, at all levels, have not given sufficient attention to the need to improve provision for the less able pupils in key stage 2 and, as a result, too few pupils are making good progress and attaining the standards expected for their age.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school community is committed to keeping pupils safe. While record-keeping systems are not rigorously maintained, the statutory duties are met and the culture of safeguarding is strong. Dedicated leaders ensure that vulnerable pupils receive high levels of support. For example, records and emails show how concerns are raised and responded to at an early stage with appropriate referral to external agencies for specialist support. Policies and procedures are embedded in the school's daily practice. Staff, including the designated safeguarding leads, are appropriately trained to be able to undertake work with children and keep them safe. As a result, staff are vigilant and know what to do in a range of situations.

Leaders correctly identified concerns over pupils' rising absence last year. A detailed analysis was undertaken and appropriate intervention led to pupils attending school regularly. As a result, attendance figures for this year are significantly higher.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Governors oversee the work of leaders and successfully provide challenge to make sure that the school complies with the current regulations and legislation. Staff are knowledgeable and feel confident to report concerns at the earliest stages.

Importantly, every pupil said they feel safe at school and that everyone respects each other. As one pupil said, 'There's no bullying or fighting or anything, we just have little arguments.' All the pupils I spoke to were confident that, if there was a problem with bullying, adults would take quick and effective action to address it. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about teaching they had received about how to keep themselves safe, especially their cycling safety scheme and about how they could stay safe if a stranger got into school. Pupils learn about how to stay safe online. Older pupils told me about the damage that can be done by a computer virus and pupils of every age promptly recited the action they should take if they see anything inappropriate when using technology 'switch off and tell an adult'.

Inspection findings

- At the start of this inspection I shared a number of key lines of enquiry. The first considered the impact of action taken by leaders to raise standards in key stage 2. This is because the proportions of pupils achieving the standards expected for their age is lower than the national average. Leaders have correctly identified the need to improve standards, particularly in reading and have focused on teaching the skills of answering comprehension questions. These include the retrieval of information from the text and how to deduce information. This is in addition to regular and systematic teaching of spelling, punctuation and grammar. As a result, these skills are now taught consistently throughout key stage 2. Leaders have clear strategies for the effective teaching of reading comprehension skills but, while some groups are making good progress, there is little evidence that this is consistent in all year groups.
- The next area we looked at was the impact of action taken to improve the quality of teaching of mathematics in key stage 2, particularly for less able pupils. You have given careful consideration to the teaching of mathematics and invested in new resources, such as online applications for practice of multiplication tables and manipulatives to support pupils to understand key mathematical concepts. Leaders have ensured that all staff have received appropriate training in the new approaches to the teaching of mathematics, including encouraging pupils to make wise choices about the level of challenge they choose. Although the progress of less able pupils has not been identified as a particular concern, leaders and teachers regularly discuss the progress of all pupils, including the less able, and design interventions to meet individual learning needs. Pupils' books show that their learning needs are usually met and the pupils spoke positively about how feedback from their teachers helps them to identify misconceptions and correct their mistakes. Pupils told me that the new system of having group discussion time with teachers gives them confidence to take on additional challenges. However, the school's own assessment system shows that while some groups of pupils are making good progress, this is not consistent.
- You are also aware of the dip in the proportions of pupils reaching the expected standards in the phonics screening at the end of Year 1. Leaders have acted decisively to deliver rigorous training so that phonics is consistently well taught by all adults. You have introduced new approaches to the teaching and assessment of phonics, frequently checking the progress of pupils and adapting

sequences of lessons in response. As a result, pupils are making good progress. They enjoy their phonics sessions and are highly motivated to persevere when they find learning difficult.

- Finally, we looked at whether pupils enjoy a broad and balanced curriculum which offers them plentiful opportunities to extend their learning. School leaders are determined to offer a broad, fully inclusive and challenging curriculum at Steeple Claydon but rightly acknowledge that this is not yet the case. You have ensured that pupils receive teaching across a range of subjects and you are successfully motivating pupils in a few of these. Pupils described, in some detail, the punishments for various crimes in Tudor times and engaged in lively discussion about which type of animal fur and excrement was used to make houses in Roman times. However, teaching in most subjects in key stage 2 lacks sufficient challenge for the majority of pupils. Where teaching is strongest, there are some good examples of cross-curricular writing across a range of subjects but very little evidence of appropriate challenge. Where teaching is weaker, in key stage 2, tasks are too simple and inappropriate for the age group. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning across the range of subjects in key stage 2 does not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to extend their learning and make good progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- Record-keeping and systems are understood and used consistently by all appropriate staff
- They have a sharply focused action plan for improving outcomes for less able pupils and that this is clearly communicated to all staff so that greater proportions of pupils reach the standards expected for their age at the end of key stage 2
- The new curriculum is consistently and fully implemented throughout the school so that pupils are challenged and inspired by a broad and balanced curriculum

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

Yours sincerely

Clare Morgan
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Together with two senior leaders, the inspector visited lessons in Nursery, Reception, key stage 1 and key stage 2. The inspector spoke to pupils and examined work in their exercise books. Meetings were held with senior leaders, including the headteacher and leaders of mathematics and English. I met with three members of the governing body. I took into account 63 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 22 written responses. I documented 24 responses to the staff survey and 44 pupil responses. A range of documents was reviewed, including: the school's development plan; leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness; the school's single central record of recruitment checks made on staff; information about pupils' achievement; records of action taken to support pupils with a range of needs; records of attendance; and minutes of governing body meetings.