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Mr John Ronane
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Dear Mr Ronane

Short inspection of Ickford School

Following my visit to the school on 11 December 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 your predecessor 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. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You lead the school with passion and dedication, and you are determined that each and every pupil will excel at everything they experience. Together with the assistant headteacher, you have ensured that all members of your community contribute to your vision of excellence. You have set high expectations for staff, which they have risen to, with commitment. Staff unanimously agree that they are proud to work at the school. Morale is high.

Pupils are proud of their school too. They say their teachers 'plan fun lessons'. Pupils told me how they learn from their mistakes and that their teachers will 'keep on going over learning if we don't understand'. Pupils love many aspects of school life, including the weekly celebration assembly and the wide range of sporting opportunities on offer. As one parent wrote, 'My daughter wakes up every morning and cannot wait to go to school. I can't tell you how lovely it is for me to have her be so happy and bubbly about going to school.'

Behaviour is exemplary and pupils work hard in lessons. They explained to me how the four Ickford values help them behave like an Ickford citizen. Pupils have a deep understanding of respect, equality and tolerance.

The inspection of your predecessor school highlighted several strengths, including highly effective leadership and governance, and strong relationships with parents. These remain strengths of the school. Since the last inspection, the school has become an academy. Governors and members of your trust are highly effective. They know the school well and are committed to further improvement. Governors hold leaders rigorously to account.

The vast majority of parents are highly complimentary about the school. They value the high standards that you promote in everything that the school does, and cherish the nurturing and caring side of the school. As one parent wrote, summing up the views of many, 'Ickford may be a small school but it is hugely ambitious. The standard of teaching and the quality of work produced is astonishing. The children are taught the value of hard work, dedication, perseverance, respect and kindness.'

At the inspection of your predecessor school, leaders were asked to ensure that work challenged the most able pupils. Leaders have had much success here. Outcomes are strong at Ickford. By the time that pupils leave the school, their attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is high compared to the national picture. Every child who has left the school since 2015 has reached at least the expected level for their age in reading, writing and mathematics, and many have attained higher. In addition, the progress made by pupils by the end of key stage 2 in 2018 in reading, writing and mathematics was significantly greater than that seen nationally. As a result, pupils are well prepared for their secondary education. These high standards are also maintained across a wide range of subjects, including science, languages and music. However, leaders are not complacent, and know that outcomes could be even higher at the end of key stage 1.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Day-to-day routines are secure. Pre-employment checks to ensure the suitability of all adults who work or volunteer in the school are fully in place. Safeguarding records are detailed, and communication between staff is strong. Any safeguarding concerns are followed up swiftly. Relationships across the school are extremely positive. Staff are well trained and understand their responsibilities to keep pupils safe.

Pupils say that they feel extremely safe in school. They say that staff will always listen to them 'if you are not feeling your best self.' There are many opportunities within the curriculum for pupils to learn about keeping themselves safe. For example, they told me about a recent visit from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, which brought the Childline service to their attention should they ever need it. Pupils also have a very secure understanding of how to keep themselves safe online.

Pupils told me that 'bullying is not okay at Ickford.' They said that if it were to happen, they would use the school's 'steps to stop' strategy. They have complete faith that the 'headteacher would find out very quickly' and help them. Parents, too, overwhelmingly agree that their children are safe and well looked after at Ickford.

Inspection findings

- The school's curriculum is a key strength of the school. Leaders have ensured that the study of reading, writing and mathematics is supplemented by highly effective teaching in a wide range of other subjects. Music is another highlight of the school, with every child in key stage 2 learning the violin. Children learn to read music and play the recorder as soon as they enter early years. As a result, pupils have regular opportunities to perform and present to others, and these opportunities help build their confidence and self-esteem. Pupils develop a depth of knowledge, understanding and skills in many subjects. For example, pupils spoke enthusiastically about the learning of French and Latin. The most able pupils are effectively challenged across the wider curriculum. There are many opportunities for pupils to learn about equality and diversity. As a result, they are prepared well for life in modern Britain.
- In order to ensure that pupils make strong progress in the early years and key stage 1, leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning frequently through a carefully planned cycle of activities. They work closely with staff to continually develop and sharpen their teaching skills. Newly qualified teachers are well inducted and supported to thrive at the beginning of their careers. During my visits to lessons, I saw that teachers used questioning well to challenge pupils to think deeply and probe their understanding. Teaching assistants are highly skilled and well trained and, as a result, they make an effective contribution to pupils' learning. Teachers use assessment information well to ensure that they have a clear overview of pupils' strengths and areas where they need further support. As a result, leaders and staff can identify early any pupils who may need additional support. Current pupils are making strong progress in the early years and key stage 1, especially in writing. However, some pupils are capable of making even more progress, especially those pupils who have the potential to reach the higher standards.
- I examined whether there was a gender gap in pupils' attainment and progress in English. Leaders are committed to inspiring all pupils so that they write to a high standard. During my visits to lessons, I observed high engagement in learning from both genders. For example, in a Year 6 English lesson pupils had read about the Christmas truce of 1914. Writing in role as a soldier from the front, the pupils wrote effective, emotive language with a high level of attention to detail. All pupils to whom I spoke, of both genders, had a love of reading. Their work shows that they read widely in other subjects, and they have many opportunities to research their interests. As a result, the attainment of boys and girls in English is equally high. The progress they make is similar.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching consistently provides challenge so that a greater proportion of pupils reach the higher standards at the end of key stage 1.

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

Lea Hannam
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the assistant headteacher to discuss the school's effectiveness. You and I visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning, and to talk to pupils about their work and their attitudes to learning. We looked at the quality of work in pupils' books. I considered 83 responses from parents to the online questionnaire, Parent View, including free-text comments. I also spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day. Responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire were considered. There was only one response to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.

I met with three governors, including the chair of the governing body, and a member of your academy trust. In addition, I had a meeting with a group of pupils and gathered the views of other pupils during the course of the day. A wide range of documents was examined, including: school improvement planning; information about pupils' progress; and various policies. I also examined the school's website.