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Dear Mrs Antrobus

Short inspection of Newtown School

Following my visit to the school on 25 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 October 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, together with your staff and governors, have created a strong team which puts the needs of pupils first. You work tirelessly to ensure that pupils are safe, well cared for and achieve well. You do this by establishing policies and practices that are understood and implemented consistently across the school. As a school that is at the heart of the community, you welcome pupils and their families from a diverse range of backgrounds. This fosters a strong culture of inclusion and a desire to meet the needs of all pupils. This is reflected in the comment from a parent who wrote: 'Newtown School is passionate about learning and helping all children of all abilities and backgrounds to grow as learners and in respecting and understanding of others. I cannot recommend the school highly enough.'

You translate this passion for learning across all aspects of the school's work. You provide training for teachers to help them to become even better teachers. You empower less-experienced members of staff to take on additional responsibilities and so prepare them for the next stage of their careers. You have created a culture in which staff are not afraid to take risks and try out new ideas. This has led to teaching that is lively and engaging and which inspires pupils to learn well, demonstrating highly positive attitudes to learning.

You and your talented team of governors know the school well. You have clear plans in place to address aspects that require further development. You know that subject leaders are ready for the next step to secure improvements to the teaching

of their subject. You have successfully addressed the issues for improvement from the previous inspection. You have substantially improved the provision in the early years so that children, including those who are most able, achieve well. You have ensured that pupils have more opportunities to write in all subjects. While this has led to some improvements to pupils' writing, you know that more needs to be done to embed their writing skills securely.

Pupils love their school and this is demonstrated by their excellent behaviour. They are polite, friendly and welcoming and they speak highly of the care provided by staff. They show respect towards each other and towards adults and say that they are treated equally and fairly. The outdoor area has been furnished with plenty of games and equipment, and this provides pupils with activities at breaktimes that help to keep them fit and healthy.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your governors have established a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. You have procedures in place to ensure that all adults who come into contact with pupils are carefully checked. Your training records show that staff and governors have been recently trained on different aspects of safeguarding and are fully up to date with requirements. Staff say that they feel confident that they know how to spot signs that a pupil may be in need of help. You are tenacious in following up concerns regarding the safety and well-being of pupils. The leadership team ensures that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that adults take good care of them. They are taught how to stay safe when using modern technology during lessons. The curriculum is well planned to provide opportunities for pupils to learn how to stay safe from other potential dangers. For example, pupils are taught about road safety and the need to be careful around household dangers, including boiling water and electrical items.

Inspection findings

- One of the aspects of the school's work that we looked at was the extent to which the school meets the needs of different groups of pupils. There are relatively few pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, and few disadvantaged pupils (those who are supported by the pupil premium grant). However, published performance information in 2017 showed that these two groups of pupils do not always achieve equally as well as other pupils. School leaders carried out a thorough analysis of the needs of these vulnerable youngsters in order to identify their specific barriers to learning. This has enabled staff to provide tailored support to help these pupils to overcome their difficulties.
- A number of disadvantaged pupils have complex additional needs that prevent them from learning as well as they might. Some of these pupils are provided with additional help in classrooms to enable them to keep up with their classmates. Other pupils who have social and emotional difficulties have access to nurture

provision. This helps to improve their readiness to learn when they return to the classroom.

- The new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has quickly gained a good overview of the provision and outcomes for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. She has worked alongside teachers to identify those pupils who have gaps in their knowledge or who have a specific difficulty that prevents them from learning as well as other pupils. The SENCo helps teachers to create plans showing the actions that they are going to take to address pupils' gaps or barriers. These are then checked on a regular basis to ensure that pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are progressing at similar rates to other pupils. The most recent assessment information shows that pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make rapid gains in their learning.
- We also agreed to look at the extent to which pupils make enough progress in writing. This is because assessment information in 2017 indicates that pupils do not do as well in writing as they do in reading and mathematics. Evidence from the inspection shows that writing is not taught consistently well across the school. The English subject leader has provided training for staff on using a range of resources and approaches, including texts, to develop writing. However, she has not yet ensured that all staff are consistently using these ideas and resources.
- Work in pupils' books shows that pupils write across a range of subjects, and this helps them to develop stamina for writing. They write from first-hand experience, for example describing what they did in the holidays, as well as writing about facts and events. However, there is very little evidence of the impact of any feedback that teachers have provided, and so pupils do not develop their writing skills systematically. The work in some books is untidy and pupils' handwriting is poorly formed. Not all pupils have developed an accurate understanding of grammar, spelling or sentence structure. Teachers do not all pick up on these misunderstandings and pupils often repeat their mistakes. Consequently, not all pupils make as much progress in writing as they should.
- The final aspect of the school's work that we agreed to review was how well children learn and develop in the early years. The outdoor area has been fully developed since the previous inspection and provides plenty of opportunities for adults to extend children's learning. This helps all children, including those who are most able, to progress well in all aspects of their development. The quality of assessment is strong, so that adults can plan activities that build on what children already know and understand. The quality of work in children's learning journeys is a delight to see and shows clear progress across the year. The relationships between adults and children are strong, and contribute to children feeling safe and secure and well looked after in school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide pupils with effective feedback to help them embed their grammar, spelling and punctuation and to present their work neatly

- subject leaders ensure that teachers act on their recommendations and guidance.

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

Joy Considine
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Together, we visited most classrooms, including those in the early years. I held meetings with you and other school leaders as well as with five governors. I held a telephone discussion with your previous school improvement adviser. I reviewed a wide range of documentation, including your plans for improvement, your school website, minutes from governors' meetings and information relating to your arrangements for safeguarding pupils. I took into account the views of parents by analysing the 29 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and by considering a wide range of parents' comments on free-text. I took the views of staff into account by analysing 16 responses to the staff survey.