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Miss Sarah Mitchell
Headteacher
Gonville Academy
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Dear Miss Mitchell

Short inspection of Gonville Academy

Following my visit to the school on 14 March 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 June 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since the last inspection, there have been significant staff changes at all levels. You are working closely with your new deputy and assistant headteachers to focus on accurate school priorities. You are 'growing your own' teachers, so that there is a consistent approach to teaching. This is working well and evident in the phonics and mathematics teaching seen. You have supported teachers in developing their subject knowledge so that they are more confident in their teaching. For example, you have provided phonics training to staff in the older classes to support pupils who need encouragement and support in their reading.

You actively seek advice from the academy trust and the local authority. This ensures that the school remains outward looking and benefits from external expertise. In turn, other trust schools have used your strengths in the early years to develop their practice.

Parents who responded to the Ofsted online survey are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They unanimously agree that their child is happy at school, with one stating, 'I couldn't be happier.' Staff responses are also extremely positive about being a part of Gonville Academy.

Pupils are true ambassadors for the school. Throughout the inspection they were

courteous and keen to articulate their learning. They are clearly proud to be pupils at Gonville Academy.

Despite the changes in staffing since the last inspection, you have ensured that the level of challenge provided for all pupils remains a priority. This was an area for improvement in the last inspection and you acknowledge that there is still work to be done to stretch the most able. You have developed the quality of questioning to deepen learning. As a result, pupils offer considered responses to questions about their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is effective. All staff and governors receive regular safeguarding training. They have all read, and also been quizzed on, the most recent statutory guidance. As a result, they are clear about new national safeguarding priorities. Staff spoken to know how to report concerns. Designated safeguarding leaders respond quickly to concerns and keep very detailed records. Safer recruitment practice is robust and meets statutory requirements.

All pupils spoken to, and an overwhelming majority of pupils who took part in the survey, say that they feel safe in school. This is because the school is a, 'safe environment' and that, 'adults will always step in to help'. Pupils can explain the different forms of bullying and how to respond if they are witness to it by, 'telling a trusted adult'. They know how to keep themselves safe online because they told me they have been taught this in computing lessons. Parents and staff echo the views of pupils and agree that children are safe at Gonville Academy.

Inspection findings

- The first line of enquiry we agreed to explore was what leaders are doing to accelerate progress for all pupils so that attainment meets the national standards in reading. In 2016 the school was below these standards, because some groups of pupils did not make as much progress as they could have.
- Your leadership team has identified reading as a school priority and has put in place a range of strategies to accelerate the progress of all pupil groups. You have identified pupils who will benefit from more opportunities to practise their reading and you are providing additional support for them. You have also focused on developing comprehension. Pupils spoken to say that this helps them to understand what they are reading, and develops their vocabulary and reading fluency.
- We also agreed to look at phonics as part of the reading focus because not enough pupils met the expected standard in the phonics screening check in 2016. Leaders have supported teachers to deliver a structured and consistent approach to phonics. Pupils who read to me used their phonic knowledge well to sound out unknown words. Those who did not meet the phonics standard last year are making good progress in their reading because of the targeted teaching they receive. They are on track to meet the expected standard and this represents good progress. All pupils spoken to enjoy reading. The most able readers read

with enthusiasm and are keen to talk about their favourite authors.

- School leaders work closely with another local school and the trust schools to ensure that assessments are accurate. The current assessment information is robust and shows that the standards of current Year 6, Year 4 and Year 2 pupils are already high. You acknowledge that there is still work to be done to ensure that the reading initiatives are embedded consistently across the rest of the school.
- The second line of enquiry focused on the impact of leaders on improving the rates of progress in writing in both key stages. We agreed to focus on the most able pupils, because they did not make as much progress as other pupils in 2016.
- School leaders ensure that pupils have the opportunity to practise talking before they write. Work in books and current assessment information show that this has led to greater rates of progress. The quality of writing across subjects is consistent. At times, the most able pupils are limited in the amount they can write. They do not always have the opportunity to develop their writing further.
- Younger pupils use their phonic knowledge well when attempting to write complex words. The impact of the 'talking before writing' approach is evident in their use of full sentences and in their vivid descriptions. Older pupils use a range of sophisticated vocabulary and write with increasing confidence. Pupils report that they enjoy their writing and can explain what they need to do to improve. Leaders' focus on handwriting is paying dividends in the younger classes. However, the teaching of handwriting in key stage 2 is inconsistent. This is preventing some pupils from achieving even more.
- Finally, we agreed to focus on what leaders are doing to accelerate the progress of middle-attaining pupils in mathematics at key stage 2, so that more meet the expected standard. We focused on this group of pupils because their attainment last year was well below the national standard and this impacted on overall attainment, which was also below the national figure. Your leadership team has been swift in its response to address this.
- You have identified that pupils are less confident in applying their mathematics to a range of real-life situations. Pupils' work shows that they have more opportunities to apply their knowledge through reasoning and problem-solving activities. Work in books and current assessment information indicate that your actions to accelerate pupils' progress in mathematics are effective. Pupils in the current Year 6, including the middle-attaining group, are already working at higher standards than last year. Pupils say that they enjoy problem-solving and that the level of challenge in mathematics is, 'just right'.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they provide more opportunities for the most able pupils to write at length in order to make greater progress in writing

- they build on existing strategies to accelerate progress in reading across all year groups.

I am copying this letter to the executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Croydon. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Helen Ridding
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I carried out the following activities during the inspection.

I discussed the work of the school with you, the deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher for inclusion at the start of the inspection. I considered the responses from Parent View, the Ofsted online survey and the responses of staff and pupils.

I met with a group of pupils to discuss their learning and the extent to which they feel safe in school. I held discussions with the chief executive and head of standards from the STEP Academy Trust, the chair and a governor from the strategic governing body and two local authority representatives. I met with the headteacher and inclusion leader in their roles as safeguarding leaders, and the school business manager responsible for maintaining the single central record.

The headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteachers accompanied me on my visits to lessons where we looked at pupils' work and observed teaching and learning. I listened to pupils read from Years 1, 2, 3 and 6. I met with a group of senior and middle leaders. I considered documentation provided by the school and information posted on the school's website.