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Mrs Tania Sidney-Roberts
Principal
The Free School Norwich
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Dear Mrs Sidney-Roberts

Short inspection of The Free School Norwich

Following my visit to the school on 22 November 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 July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

The Free School Norwich continues to provide a warm and nurturing environment where pupils enjoy learning and make good progress. You continue to provide effective leadership. You carry out regular and rigorous checks on teaching and learning and act swiftly when you identify areas to improve, so that the school continues to go from strength to strength.

Together with your team, you took effective action to address the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. One of these was to improve the teaching of writing so that pupils achieve well, and consequently progress in writing is strong across the school.

You have improved the provision for pupils' personal development, which was another area identified in the previous inspection report. Because of the changes you introduced to the curriculum, provision for pupils' personal development is now a strength of the school. Pupils enjoy a broad and interesting curriculum that is well matched to their needs and interests. They enjoy, for example, the opportunity to select activities during personalised learning sessions. They learn about other faiths and cultures and show respect for themselves and for others because this is taught throughout the curriculum. Pupils enjoy the broad range of clubs and other activities which are provided, including the opportunity to learn an instrument, to take part in

sports activities, such as sailing, and to learn languages. During the inspection, pupils were enjoying learning about the work of different artists, and drawing on this to stimulate their own art work. The quality of their work was good because teachers demonstrated good subject knowledge and skill in modelling art techniques.

Governors support leaders well. They are knowledgeable about the school because they visit both formally and informally, often dropping in to see the school at work. Governors meet together regularly to discuss all aspects of the school with you and other leaders. They are proactive in making suggestions for the school's further improvement. Governors look for ways to support the school even more effectively. For example, they have recently reviewed their skills so that these can be used to best effect when allocating responsibilities linked to the school's development plan.

Teaching is good and particularly strong in Years 5 and 6. This is because you and your senior team make your expectations very clear to all staff through regular monitoring and feedback. You look closely at the impact that teaching is having on pupils' progress in each class and know where teaching is most effective and where it could be even better. As a result, teachers, including those who are new to the school, know exactly what is expected of them and are supported in achieving this. Teachers have positive relationships with pupils, and pupils told me that they like their teachers because they are always there to help them. They said that pupils who are most able will be given greater challenges. Teachers often ask questions which make pupils think hard. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use vocabulary that is specific to particular subjects well, such as 'perspective' and 'contrast' in art.

Pupils behave well in lessons and at playtimes. They work well independently and in groups, speaking with confidence to adults and each other and showing respect for each other's views. Pupils enjoy school, as reflected in their above-average attendance.

Parents are mostly supportive of the school, and a number of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, commented positively on the care provided by staff and the school's positive ethos. Typical comments included, 'I have massive confidence in the school: I have seen improvements in all my children since they started at this school' and 'I feel like The Free School is excellent at giving really good individual care for each child. It has a caring, family-like atmosphere.'

A small number of parents raised concerns about aspects of behaviour management. We discussed these concerns. We agreed that some parents have yet to share pupils' confidence in the effectiveness of the school's systems for behaviour management because they have not received enough feedback about its impact.

Safeguarding is effective.

You make sure that keeping pupils safe is central to the work of the school. All

checks on staff are carried out in line with statutory requirements. You make sure that all staff receive regular and thorough training in all aspects of safeguarding, and that safeguarding is a regular item on staff-meeting agendas. You are meticulous in maintaining the files for pupils about whom concerns have been raised. Concern forms show that staff know what to look for which may indicate that a child is at risk of harm and that you make sure that follow-up action is taken swiftly. You liaise with external agencies to make sure that appropriate support is put in place for individual pupils and families when needed. You make sure that online safety is taught within the curriculum. This is effective and pupils know what information they should and should not share when online. You recognise that you need to make sure that parents are fully informed about the potential risks faced by their children when online and about how to help keep them safe at home.

Pupils told me that playtimes are happy times and that they feel safe in school. They know what bullying is and say that it is rare in school. They said that the new behaviour sanctions, developed by the school council in discussion with you, are proving very effective in improving behaviour at playtimes even more.

Inspection findings

- The first area that we agreed I would look at during the inspection was the progress that pupils are making in mathematics in all year groups. This was because in 2017 at the end of Year 6, pupils' progress was below that found nationally and the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard dipped from the previous year. This was in contrast to the high standards achieved in writing. I wanted to understand why there was this difference and how you have addressed this.
- I looked at pupils' writing. Improving writing was an area for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. I found that writing is strong in most classes. I found examples of pupils being given good opportunities to write at length within English and in other subjects, such as religious education. However, the recent emphasis on developing pupils' spelling and grammar has meant that some pupils are not developing their writing stamina by writing at length on a regular enough basis.
- I looked at pupils' mathematics work across the school. This shows that a good range of mathematics is being taught and pupils are developing their arithmetic skills well.
- You have introduced a greater emphasis on reasoning and problem solving because you identified that pupils struggled with these aspects the previous year. This is particularly evident in Years 5 and 6, where pupils are given good opportunities to apply their knowledge in different contexts. As a result, pupils are making good progress.
- In other year groups, although pupils make good progress in other aspects of mathematics, there is limited evidence of pupils being given regular opportunities to deepen their understanding, for example by talking about different ways they solve problems or how they know an answer is correct.

- I spoke with you, with teachers and with your mathematics leader about your actions to improve mathematics. You acknowledge that further training is needed to ensure that mathematics leaders are knowledgeable about the latest approaches to mathematics teaching and that all staff are confident in teaching reasoning and problem solving, including to younger pupils.
- The next area that I looked at was whether boys and girls make equally good progress. This was because there were some indications that boys tend to make better progress than girls in the school.
- I visited all classes and found that boys and girls are equally enthusiastic in their lessons. Pupils' books show that boys and girls make equally good efforts with their work in mathematics, writing and other areas of the curriculum. This picture is confirmed by the school's assessment information, which shows that both boys and girls are making equally good progress.
- The third area that I looked at during the inspection was whether pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make good progress, as the number of these pupils within published data is small.
- The school runs after-school provision for dyslexic pupils from The Free School and from other schools and uses many of these resources within day-to-day teaching for pupils who need this so that they access the curriculum well.
- I looked at the school's provision map for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. I found that this was carefully planned and well matched to pupils' needs. Because of this, pupils make good progress relative to their starting points. This was evident from the pupils' targets shown on individual plans.
- Additional adults support pupils well and sensitively. However, sometimes pupils are not given enough opportunity to develop their independence by working without support or by working within mixed-ability groups when appropriate. The new leader for special educational needs has good plans in place for further developing the checks on provision to ensure that all support is finely tuned to pupils' needs.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- reasoning and problem solving are developed across the school so that pupils' progress in mathematics continues to improve
- pupils in all classes are given regular opportunities to develop their writing stamina by writing at length
- middle leaders draw on and disseminate current research about effective practice in their subjects and use this to improve teaching and learning further
- leaders provide additional information to parents about the positive impact of new behaviour rewards and sanctions.

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

Yours sincerely

Maria Curry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, with some middle leaders and with three governors. I met with a group of pupils from Years 4, 5 and 6. I scrutinised a range of documents, including information on pupils' progress, safeguarding, development planning and the school's self-evaluation. I visited all classes and evaluated pupils' work. I took account of 61 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I checked the school's website and found it to meet requirements on the publication of specified information.