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Miss Jane Scarborough
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Scarborough

Short inspection of Roman Way First School

Following my visit to the school on 3 February 2016, 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 March 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. In all classes, pupils make good progress. Academic standards at the end of Key Stage 1 are above average and, by the end of Year 4, pupils are well prepared for learning at middle school.

You and your team have organised teaching and learning so that there is sufficient attention to the core skills of reading, writing and mathematics but also plenty of opportunity for other subjects and creative activities. This works well and gives all pupils the chance to experience success in many different ways. Consequently, pupils behave well, show interest in their lessons and say they enjoy school.

Your work to improve the school further since the previous inspection has been productive. For example, you have lifted the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, standards in reading have risen and persistent absence, while still too high, has reduced. Governance has also improved, although governors could do more to help school leaders with aspects of forward planning. You give teachers regular feedback about their work but recognise that you could improve the way you do this.

Just recently, you have focused your attention on the introduction of new assessment arrangements and staff are still getting to grips with these. At the

moment, the way teachers use assessment information to plan lessons works more efficiently in reading and writing than in mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

Proper checks are carried out on staff and visitors and record-keeping is organised and up to date. Staff know what to do if they have a concern about a pupil's safety or well-being. When staff have had cause to act, they have done so with due regard for proper processes so that the right people get the right information at the right time. Supervision at the beginning and end of the school day ensures that all pupils are accounted for and staff are quick to follow up any unexplained absence. School policies and staff training are up to date so all are aware of their responsibilities with regard to pupils' safety. Parents and pupils spoken to during this inspection said they had confidence in the school's work to keep everyone safe.

Inspection findings

- Pupils do well at this good school. From their starting points at the beginning of early years, which are often below those typical for their age, pupils make good progress in all classes.
- Year after year, standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 1 have been just above average and this good achievement continues in Years 3 and 4. Consequently, by the end of Year 4, pupils are well prepared for their move up to middle school. Inspection evidence confirms that this good progress seen in previous years is continuing for current pupils, although it is stronger in reading and writing than in mathematics.
- In recent times, disadvantaged pupils have done particularly well at Roman Way First School. At the end of Key Stage 1 in 2015, for instance, disadvantaged pupils were ahead of other pupils nationally in reading and only just behind them in writing and mathematics. Currently, these pupils are doing well in all year groups, although, like other pupils, their progress is stronger in English than in mathematics. The school's success at helping this group of pupils to achieve is a notable feature of its work.
- The teaching of reading is a significant strength. Phonics (letters and the sounds they make) teaching in the younger classes is very effective and is reflected in the above-average results in the Year 1 phonics screening check. In addition, pupils get many opportunities to read in class, for pleasure and as a regular part of their classwork. Adults read to pupils, and pupils frequently read to one another. Throughout the school, a sense of enjoyment of books and stories shines out and is clear to see. Standards in writing are also good. Pupils write for many worthwhile purposes and get helpful guidance about how to edit and improve their work.
- Teaching and learning in mathematics is not quite as strong as that seen in English. This is because new assessment routines in mathematics are not as sharp as those used in English. Occasionally, the pitch of work is not quite right. Some pupils are given work that they don't understand so they find it hard to

keep up. On top of this, teachers' checks on pupils' progress and understanding are not always timely. This means that some mistakes or misunderstandings are not noticed soon enough, so learning time is lost. Pupils' presentation of their mathematics work is also rather erratic – excellent in some books, but untidy in others.

- Pupils who need extra attention or teaching to help them develop key skills or to catch up with others, receive targeted help. Booster group sessions run after school, and during the school day teaching assistants provide one-to-one tuition or small-group support when necessary. What characterises all the support on offer is that it is tailored to specific needs with the aim of equipping pupils with the skills they need in order to succeed at school.
- The school provides an interesting curriculum and pupils get the chance to learn in many different ways. During this inspection, for example, children in the Nursery were observed carrying out a treasure hunt outdoors. They listened to pre-recorded 'clues' taken from the text of traditional stories and then had to find pictures of the relevant storybook character hidden in the woods. This simple but imaginative task required them to listen, discuss, think and explore and, in some cases, make notes about their discoveries. It was highly engaging, purposeful and fun. Indeed, whether teaching French, dance or leading whole-school singing, school staff inject interest, variety and good subject knowledge into their approach. This helps to keep pupils engaged and enthused about learning while also introducing them to new experiences and skills that serve to broaden their horizons.
- Pupils are well behaved. During this inspection, numerous parents, pupils and staff commented favourably about pupils' attitudes to others and to their work. On the playground, pupils manage a wide selection of play equipment with common sense and a minimum of fuss. They show consideration and care for others, and while a 'falling-out' can happen from time to time, this is not commonplace. In lessons, pupils are attentive and responsive. They listen to their teachers and are keen to please and participate. When volunteers were requested during a whole-school assembly, for example, every hand went up.
- Systems for following up unexplained absence work well. Registers are kept correctly and parents are sent regular reminders about the importance of good attendance at school and its link with achievement. This is evidently making a difference. Absence, which has been above average over time, is reducing. This year to date, the overall attendance rate stands at 96.1%, which is the highest figure seen for many years. Persistent absence, while also reducing, is still too high. While some pupils have genuine reasons for missing school, a small number of pupils miss school too often for no good reason. These pupils miss valuable learning time and this hinders their progress.
- This year, there has been some unavoidable staff absence. Currently, the deputy headteacher is absent and it is clear that the absence of this key leader is felt keenly. However, this situation has prompted other staff to take on new responsibilities. In the main, these temporary arrangements are working well and planned school development has continued. New assessment methods have been implemented and staff are receiving training to help them develop the

leadership skills needed in their new roles. Having said this, some systems operate quite informally and checks on the effectiveness of teaching are not quite as efficient or as focused on learning as they could be. For example, sometimes staff get informal feedback that centres on compliance with school policy or classroom relationships (both important) and not enough guidance about the impact of their teaching on pupils' learning.

- Governors have routines in place to keep them suitably informed and involved in checking on the school's work. They know the key headlines about the school's current performance and several governors regularly help out in practical ways, running school clubs for example. In terms of their long-term vision for ongoing school improvement, governors have a stated ambition to create an outstanding school. However, governors are not certain about the steps they need to take to realise this ambition. To their credit, governors recognise this and have sought advice to help them with their strategic planning. It is clear that they are on the right path but there is still a journey ahead of them.
- Parents express largely positive views about the school's work and describe staff as approachable and helpful. A few parents think that communication from the school is a bit 'last minute'. Nevertheless, at the time of this inspection, the school website was up to date with key information and newsletters. In addition, the school office sends out text messages in order to keep everyone informed, as needs be.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders' feedback to staff about their teaching pays sufficient attention to pupils' learning
- teachers take more care to check that pupils understand the mathematics work they are given
- governors do more to help school leaders with forward planning
- they continue to work with parents to improve the attendance of the small number of pupils who miss school for no good reason.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Worcestershire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Martin Pye
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, school staff, five governors and a local authority adviser. I carried out short observations of teaching and learning in all year groups and looked at pupils' work. In addition, I talked with pupils in lessons and in the dining hall and spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day.

By the end of the inspection, there were 19 recent responses on Parent View. I took account of these and noted the school's routines for communicating with parents and gathering their views. I looked at a number of documents, including pupils' progress information, the school's own evaluation of its performance and several school policy documents. I also checked the school's website and the procedures for keeping pupils safe. I talked with staff and governors about safeguarding matters.