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Mrs S Way
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Way

Short inspection of John Ray Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 1 March 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 October 2010.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. A period of significant challenge, including the destruction of the entire school by fire, has been managed well by you, your leadership team and the governing body. Despite the events of the last two years and the many sites that the school has occupied, pupils' progress has not been affected. It is testament to everyone's hard work and the leadership qualities of senior staff that the transition to the brand new school has been so smooth.

You are committed to continually improving the school and, following the previous inspection, you have successfully done so. You and your deputy head, ably supported by the new members of your senior leadership team, have tackled the areas for improvement with vigour and determination. Staff morale is high and you and the deputy headteacher have successfully taken staff to a higher level of performance, particularly in the use of assessment in the new curriculum.

You are a highly respected leader among the governing body, staff and parents. Your attention to detail and tenacity to see things through to the end is clear. You and your staff have put in place many systems since the previous inspection, including sharing leadership responsibilities. Leaders who have recently taken on positions of responsibility are following in your footsteps and are equally tenacious in their approach. It is a credit to you all that you have ensured that staff at all levels

understand the approach you are taking and implement all systems consistently. The strong partnership with your deputy headteacher enhances the overall leadership and management at the school. It is this and the strength of the leaders' and governors' vision for continued improvement that puts the school in a very strong position for the imminent changes.

The governing body has been very proactive in securing good leadership for the summer term and beyond. Governors are very complimentary about the journey that the school has taken with you at its helm. They recognise that you will be sorely missed when you retire at Easter. However, because of the strong partnership that you and your senior leadership team have developed, governors are confident that the journey will continue apace. Your experienced deputy headteacher is well respected by staff and played a full part in this inspection, as did other senior leaders. They have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development, and will be able to support the new headteacher in September. It is a compliment to you, your staff and your pupils that there has been a lot of interest in the headteacher role.

Your desire to ensure that John Ray Infant School is the best it can be is evident in the school's mantra 'to go the extra mile'. However, what is also very clear is the generous way that you have supported other schools in order to improve the outcomes for other pupils in the locality. The many partnerships that you have developed, and in which you play a significant part, are key to the school's continuing success. You make sure that staff are outward-looking. Training, sharing of good practice and regular opportunities for self-evaluation are indicative of the way that the senior leadership team works with staff. Existing ways of working are challenged and new ways are adopted in pursuit of good practice. For example, leaders of English and mathematics now meet regularly with those responsible for outcomes in the Reception classes, Year 1 and Year 2. This new way of working has ensured that staff know the pupils exceptionally well and plan for individual needs. Staff are confident to try new things and feel well supported, safe in the knowledge that it is good to 'have a go' at something different. This is carried through to the way that your pupils approach their work.

At the time of the previous inspection, the leadership team was asked to accelerate pupils' progress and raise attainment in writing. This aspect of the school's work has improved. Pupils are now writing more regularly, at length and in many subjects, for example science, history, religious education and geography. You have been very clear that writing in all subjects must have the same high expectations. Pupils are, therefore, applying their basic skills of grammar, punctuation and spelling in their writing because teachers insist on it. Teachers plan work that is well suited to the needs of individual pupils and groups of pupils. As a consequence, the majority of pupils, including those pupils that are disadvantaged or have special educational needs or disability, are making good progress. Your monitoring of pupils' work in books and what we saw during the inspection highlights that progress is not as evident for the less-able pupils. You have rightly prioritised this area for improvement.

Increasing the effectiveness of monitoring arrangements was highlighted for improvement in the previous inspection report. This you have tackled relentlessly. You and your senior leaders monitor the quality of teaching regularly, highlighting the features of outstanding teaching to raise expectations further. The helpful support and guidance that you have given to newly qualified teachers, and others where improvement is necessary, has been focused on pupil outcomes where progress is now evident. Leaders are adept at monitoring and evaluating the impact of teaching on pupils' progress. Consequently, any underachievement is spotted and addressed very quickly, the evidence of which is clear in pupils' work. The work in pupils' books shows evidence of good progress and, on many occasions, accelerated progress. The school's tracking system is beginning to develop to enable leaders to easily identify the proportion of pupils whose progress is accelerating.

Given the ambition of staff and the governing body, it is no surprise that pupils are confident learners and that parents are equally confident in the leadership of the school. Pupils in Year 2 that were embarking on their trip to Colchester Castle told me that 'the school is fantastic. We get to learn exciting things and go to great places like today'. Almost all parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, are positive about the school. An overwhelming majority would recommend the school to others. One parent commented, 'My daughter needed support at school and has come on in leaps and bounds'. A few parents mentioned that they do not know if there is a medical room or what the arrangements are for pupils if they are ill while at school. You are still getting used to the new building and the fantastic facilities you have. Some areas are still being developed as you and your staff decide on future needs. The regular opportunities that you give parents to come to the school, for example at 'Tea and Chat' on Fridays, gives parents regular opportunities to explore such questions.

During my visit, I ensured I met with as many pupils as was possible. I spoke to pupils in Year 2 prior to their planned visit and with other pupils during the day. It is clear from talking with pupils, watching them in class and looking at work in their books and on displays that they enjoy learning. You and your teachers have worked hard to ensure that pupils develop independence in their learning. They enjoy moving on to 'the challenge' following the '6 rule' which they understand and use well. The very youngest children in the school happily select their next activity quickly and with confidence. I saw children working together to build a fire engine in the well-resourced outside area. Directing their own learning but with helpful and appropriate guidance from adults, they reasoned with each other, tried out different materials and listened well to each other's suggestions.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders make sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff are well trained and have had 'Prevent' training. You are relentless in your pursuit of the right support for pupils and their families. The work you do with external agencies is critical for your many vulnerable families. One parent commented, 'The standard of

care children receive is amazing'. A recently appointed and experienced governor has quickly developed a very effective relationship with you and your team. She knows and understands the regular concerns that you raise and is very vigilant in her monitoring and reporting to the full governing body. The vast majority of pupils arrive on time and attend regularly. The Family Support Worker has played a key role in ensuring parents understand the importance of regular attendance. The links made with and support of families is exemplary. This has ensured that there are many individual successes in improving pupils' attendance, especially those who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs or disability.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and governors have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and pupils' performance. Expectations of all aspects of the school's work are high because leaders have ensured that all systems put in place are based on benefiting the pupils. The morale of staff is high. Teachers have, therefore, welcomed support and guidance highlighted in the regular monitoring of teaching and learning. Some teachers' practice is excellent and they have been effectively deployed to support other schools. This in turn has resulted in a reflective team of adults who have improved outcomes for pupils.
- Children enter the school with skills that are below those expected at this age. Achievement in 2015 at the end of Reception showed a dramatic improvement on 2014. The proportion of children who reached a good level of development was still below the national average. Progress, however, was good. The school's own assessment information shows that, in 2016, outcomes will continue to rise and are likely to be at least in line with the national average, if not above.
- Leaders have prioritised the continued development of pupils' communication skills, particularly speaking. Much has been put in place to ensure that this important aspect of pupils' learning features in all lessons and activities. Talk 4 Writing is working well in supporting pupils to rehearse what they want to write. Teachers' questions and the use of 'talk partners' are ensuring a better quality of response from pupils. Work with nurseries and pre-schools in the area is already taking place to raise the profile of speaking and listening and to so improve these skills for when children enter the Foundation Stage.
- Pupils' achievement in the phonics (the sounds that letters make) check in Year 1 have risen to above the national average in 2015. This is because phonics is taught consistently well. Pupils read with confidence and use their phonics skills very effectively in both their reading and writing.
- Achievement at the end of Year 2 has continued to rise since the previous inspection. Standards are at least in line with national averages and show that pupils have made good progress from the end of the Foundation Stage. Assessment information of pupils currently in the school shows that this trend is likely to continue.
- Additional funding is spent appropriately to support the pupils for whom it is intended. The leadership team makes sure that the funding is used effectively

according to pupils' individual needs and circumstances. As a consequence, they achieve as well as other pupils in the school. Often individuals make very good progress from their varying starting points.

- The school has developed a very effective system for assessing pupils' progress. The cycle of checking and evaluating what pupils can do has become increasingly systematic and efficient. As a result, staff have the information they need to plan pupils' work effectively. Currently, this is working particularly well to identify the gaps in learning for those pupils whose learning was interrupted by changes in class teacher in the past. Leaders recognise that some pupils are making very good progress. The current system does not easily enable identification of these pupils and, therefore, celebrating these successes is not yet developed as well as it could be.
- Leaders prioritised development of independence of learning. As part of the school's marking and feedback policy, pupils are expected to respond to teachers' comments which help them to know what they need to do to improve. Staff apply the school's marking policy effectively and this works well to encourage pupils to take responsibility for improving their work. Pupils can explain what they have learned, how they have found out new things and what they might do with what they know.
- The work seen in pupils' books throughout the school in English and mathematics shows that the majority of pupils are making good progress. There is evidence that progress for less-able pupils in writing is not as strong in all classes. However, leaders recognise that this is an area for improvement. There is good practice in the school already that can be effectively shared to develop the way that teachers plan for and work with less-able pupils in writing to accelerate their progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- achievement of less-able pupils in writing is consistent throughout the school
- leaders further refine the school's assessment system so that identification and celebration of pupils who are making very good progress is reported
- effective leaders continue to work within the wider community to secure the best outcomes for children and pupils in the locality.

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

Yours sincerely

Ruth Brock
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and one other governor, a group of pupils and a representative from the local authority. I looked at the 56 views expressed by parents on Ofsted's site, Parent View, the 18 replies in the staff survey and views from Year 2 pupils in the pupil survey. I scrutinised the school's own assessment information and work in pupils' books with you and your senior leaders. I visited all classes, often with you, and spoke with individual pupils about their work, including pupils in Year 2. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's plans for improvement and evaluation of its performance, minutes of meetings and all relevant documentation regarding safeguarding, including the single central record.