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Mrs Lesley Schlanker
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Dear Mrs Schlanker

Short inspection of Baddow Hall Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 15 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 May 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school has grown in size and is justifiably popular in the local area. This year you have three Reception classes to accommodate a surge in numbers. Governors say that even though there have been significant leadership changes, the school is even stronger and continues to improve. You, staff and governors are passionate about your vision for 'every child to make the best possible progress'. You all share a clear focus and plan thoughtfully, to be the best you can. As a result, pupils are well cared for and leave Baddow Hall achieving exceptionally well in reading, writing and mathematics. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Since the last inspection you have taken on the role of headteacher. Many other leaders, including some governors and teaching staff, are also new to the school or in new roles. But these changes have not prevented you from rigorously tackling the issues raised in the last inspection report with regard to the provision of writing. There is much evidence around the school of high-quality writing opportunities for children and pupils. Their achievements in this area of learning are celebrated very well.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They are confident, polite and happy to engage in conversations about their school. Pupils cheerfully told me that they enjoy coming to school as they 'like it very much'. This is evident in the pupils' high attendance.

They rarely miss a day. Pupils socialise well at break and lunchtimes, whether energetically taking part in sporting activities such as basketball and hoopla, or when eating their lunch in the hall. They know that adults expect them to take their fair share of responsibility in all aspects of school life and pupils are very proud of the monitor roles they hold at lunchtimes.

Most parents find staff friendly and easy to approach and many describe the school as an exceptionally caring place for children to begin their education. All parents who responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View) would recommend the school, and believe their children are happy, safe and very well cared for. A few concerns were raised regarding homework. These comments were considered carefully, but I found no cause for concern.

It is clear from talking with pupils, watching them in class and looking at their work in books that pupils enjoy their learning and work hard. Your teachers work well together to plan learning opportunities that ensure pupils develop their skills in reading, writing and mathematics exceptionally well. The support staff question individuals very effectively so that each pupil can achieve their best. They provide highly effective support for pupils who have special educational needs or disability. These pupils make outstanding progress from their individual starting points, as a result.

You are aware that changes to the way pupils nationally are assessed at school have resulted in a dip in confidence for the adults, especially when deciding the starting points at the beginning of this year. You have swiftly taken action. You are enabling your teachers to work with teachers from other schools to check the standards of pupils' work. As a result, you continue to assure yourself of the accuracy and robustness of your current assessment system.

The majority of children enter the school with individual skills and abilities that are typical for their age. Teaching in the early years is strong and children get off to a 'flying start'. Even where there have been challenges through staff changes and new leadership this year, you have strengthened the provision and ensured that the progress of the children has not been affected. Children enjoy learning in a bright and welcoming environment. They are confident, follow well-established routines and expectations, and are achieving well as a result.

Safeguarding is effective.

The high level of care given to all pupils enables them to feel safe at school. All parents agree that their children are kept safe during the school day.

You have ensured that the necessary safeguarding checks are in place and that policies are up to date with the latest statutory requirements. Records are meticulously kept and adults provide exceptionally well for the safeguarding of pupils. Governors robustly monitor the practices in the school, particularly in relation to the recruitment of staff, so they can hold school leaders to account for safeguarding pupils.

Adults help pupils to develop strategies for keeping safe when using online technology. One young pupil informed me that 'you do not give your address to a stranger on the computer'. As a result of your staff's guidance, pupils can speak openly and maturely about identifying risks and what actions to take to alleviate them. They are confident that adults will help them if they are worried or concerned.

Records show that staff are appropriately and regularly trained to recognise and report child protection concerns. You presented documentary evidence that shows that referrals of concerns to other agencies are handled in a timely and tenacious fashion.

Inspection findings

- In the last inspection report, inspectors praised the school for many aspects of its work, especially above-average attendance, attainment of pupils by the end of Year 2 in reading and mathematics and the behaviour of pupils. These areas remain strengths of the school.
- You were asked to improve opportunities for pupils to extend their writing. This you have tackled rigorously. Pupils diligently edit and redraft their work, crafting final pieces of writing that are of a high quality. In Year 2, a few pupils are already producing writing in English that is of a quality well beyond their years. In the early years classes, children have a wealth of opportunity to write in a natural and easy way. This helps them develop their formation of letters quickly. By the time the pupils leave your school, many are confidently using a cursive handwriting style.
- Governors are committed and dedicated to the school. From the records of meetings, it is evident that they ask challenging questions and hold you to account for improving the outcomes for pupils. They regularly visit to ensure that behaviour and safety of pupils meets the high standards that are set.
- You continue to improve and develop the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school. Currently, you are improving the questioning skills of support staff. Throughout the inspection, adults used questions well to help pupils think and express their ideas and understanding using precise and technical language.
- In the early years classes, the children respond particularly well to your effective strategies used to accelerate their progress. Children proudly explained their 'sticker challenge'. When they complete work, they decide whether they found the activity easy, difficult or in-between. For example, a number of children confidently and accurately explained why they found making their owl mask easy, difficult or in-between.
- Pupils are polite and well mannered. This is because you and your staff model the expected behaviour and praise pupils when they follow these high expectations. Pupils speak openly about your 'shining stars'. They are clear about wanting to be a 'super star' so they can visit you for a special badge. They understand and choose to avoid the 'spiky star'. Even the youngest children want to cooperate and be the very best they can.
- You know that there are still gaps in attainment for some of the disadvantaged pupils, especially at the higher levels. You are working hard

with these pupils to accelerate their achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. You, together with your staff, go over and above to provide extra help to the pupils who need to further practise their skills in reading and mathematics so they can achieve their capabilities. You use the additional funding for these pupils carefully. Governors are starting to evaluate the impact of this money more effectively.

- Middle leaders are ambitious for the school and dedicated to making sure pupils achieve well. These leaders are new to their posts. You know that they still need to develop their monitoring of teaching and learning across the school so they can have greater impact on their subject areas.
- Pupils achieve very well during their time at Baddow Hall. This is because systems to help them learn to read, write and understand number are well established. The proportion who achieve the expected standards by the end of Year 2 is significantly above the national average for the age group and has been for some years. The vast majority of parents recognise the effective work of the school and the often exceptional progress their children make.
- You are aware that, at times, the more-able pupils are not sufficiently challenged in other subjects, for example science. The planning of learning does not include sufficient opportunities for pupils to apply and master their skills of literacy and numeracy in other subjects. This results in some pupils not demonstrating the same high standards of English and mathematics consistently across the curriculum.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers have the same high expectations of what the more-able pupils can achieve in all subjects as they have in English and mathematics
- middle leaders robustly monitor their subject areas to drive continuous school improvement and further improve the provision for pupils
- leaders use the externally moderated assessment information precisely.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, middle leaders, governors and a group of pupils. I visited classes and spoke informally with pupils and staff, as well as looking at a wide range of pupils' work in books and on display. I considered the school's approach to gathering and analysing assessment information and the progress that pupils are currently making. Safeguarding records and information about keeping pupils safe were evaluated. The views of parents were collected from 48 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. I evaluated the views of staff through 32 responses to a staff questionnaire.