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Dear Mrs Andrews-Close

Short inspection of Blackmore Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 June 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 February 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education since the last inspection and the school is rapidly improving. You have successfully established a caring environment in which adults and pupils model your core values. As a result, pupils are confident, happy and share your determination that they should be the best that they can be. One child in the Reception class explained that 'I enjoy doing learning.' Evidence gathered on this inspection shows that many pupils share this sentiment. Blackmore Primary School has deservedly established a reputation among pupils and parents as being a lovely school in which to learn.

You and your deputy headteacher provide energetic and effective leadership and are widely respected by staff, pupils and parents. Staff morale is high. You have developed a cohesive team of teachers and support staff who hold a common desire to improve the quality of education provided for every pupil in their care. As effective leaders you take decisive actions when things need to improve. For example, the early years was an area identified for improvement at the previous inspection. As a result of your effective work, children are provided with high-quality education in well-designed inside and outside learning areas. Consequently, children get off to an excellent start when they join Blackmore Primary School.

It was also noted in the previous inspection report that you should improve the way that the school communicated with parents. You have been successful in doing so through: the innovative use of technology to enable parents to track their child's

progress in the early years; the introduction of mid-year reports and regular newsletters, as well as a high profile staff presence at the school gate at the start and end of the school day. The vast majority of parents who submitted their views on Parent View agree that they receive valuable information about the progress that their children make. Almost all of these parents would recommend the school.

Supported and challenged by your governors, you skilfully manage the performance of your staff, who explained that they are held clearly to account for the quality of their work. Equally, staff are provided with appropriate opportunities to develop their teaching and leadership skills. One teacher told me that, 'I could not be more supported.' A view echoed by her colleagues. Each of the adults working at the school, and who completed the staff survey, indicated that they feel well-led, are proud to work at the school and enjoy doing so.

In the five years since the previous inspection, you and your governors have continually set high expectations as to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Through appropriate training, you enable teachers to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to improve their practice. As a result, teachers use effective techniques that enable them to plan and deliver learning that enthuses and motivates pupils. For example, due to the teacher's skilful questioning and the secure learning environment she had created, pupils of all abilities in a Year 2 lesson had the confidence to use increasingly sophisticated language as they created poetry based on the sounds and sights of the savannah.

Teachers' consistent application of the school's preferred feedback policy means that pupils know what to do improve their work. It is evident from the scrutiny of pupils' books that some teachers need to dedicate more time to reviewing the amendments that pupils make to their work and so ensure that the improvements are themselves correct and that mistakes are not repeated.

You have correctly not shied away from challenging teaching practice that is not of the standard that you expect. Although the quality of teaching, learning and assessment continues to improve, you recognise that the best practice seen in early years and at key stage 1 is not as consistently evident in every key stage 2 class. As a consequence, a small number of key stage 2 pupils are not making the high levels of progress of which they are capable.

You and your staff are rightly proud of the way that pupils approach their education. Pupils respect their school environment, each other and the adults who support them in their lessons. Lessons are characterised by pupils' positive relationships and mature approach to each learning activity. For example, pupils in Years 3 and 4 were not only supported by the adults in class, but also helped each other when solving increasingly difficult mathematical problems. As a result, they were able to develop a deeper understanding of the techniques needed to make further progress in mathematics.

Using evidence from your monitoring of teaching, you have correctly identified that a greater number of pupils need to make even better progress. You have introduced strategies such as the '1 star, 2 star and 3 star challenges' which are

proving effective. They have not fully impacted on pupils' progress over time. From the work seen in books, lessons and discussions with pupils, there remains a variability in the effectiveness with which pupils are challenged to make even greater progress.

Pupils' behaviour was judged to be outstanding at the last inspection. It remains of a similar high standard. Pupils model your core values of tolerance, respect, generosity and independence. Pupils are confident, inquisitive and hold conversations easily with adults. Pupils of all ages mix cheerfully together at play times, be it when using the climbing wall, sitting chatting on the benches or when playing one of the imaginative games that they have devised. Parents and pupils told me how inclusive and supportive pupils are of each other. Inspection evidence supports these views.

The quality of governance continues to be a strong feature of the school. Led by an experienced and knowledgeable chair, the governing body provides extremely effective challenge and support. Governors regularly visit the school, hold discussions with staff and pupils and seek the views of external agencies to confirm the accuracy of leaders' judgements. As a result, governors are well-informed and well-placed to be the advocates of success that they aim to be.

Governors use information gained from their precise scrutiny of pupils' attendance and achievement to challenge you where things still need to improve. For example, governors challenged you to reduce further the numbers of pupils who arrived late for the start of the school day. This you have achieved. In addition, your careful monitoring of attendance enables you to take decisive action where a pupil's absence begins to rise. As a result of this, and the fact that pupils enjoy coming to school, the level of pupil absence is considerably lower than the national average.

Safeguarding is effective.

Governors and school leaders have ensured that all statutory safeguarding requirements relating to safeguarding are met. Overseen by the well-informed office manager, records, including the single central record, are carefully maintained and regularly updated. Staff are appropriately trained and are aware of their responsibilities with regard to safeguarding. They know the actions to take if they have concerns about the well-being of any pupil in the school.

Leaders have ensured that pupils are provided with strategies to enable them to keep safe from the risks that exist online and in the local environment. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations. For example, pupils recalled the information they had learned when taking part in road safety exercises. They were also able to explain the 'save it, block it, report it' approach they would take if they had any concerns about their safety when online. School records indicate that bullying is a rare occurrence. Pupils, who are aware of the variety of forms that bullying can take, struggled to recall any incident of bullying at Blackmore Primary School. They were clear that, were any incident to occur, they have faith that it would be dealt with swiftly and effectively by adults at school. Almost all parents agree that their children are safe at Blackmore Primary School.

Inspection findings

- There have been significant changes at the school since the previous inspection. The highly effective deputy headteacher has been in post for two years and six new class teachers joined the school to replace those who left the school. The governing body has established a teaching and learning committee to provide governors with a sharper focus on this aspect of the school's work. There have also been changes to the school environment, the most notable being the addition of the large and well-resourced early years outdoor learning area.
- Governors and leaders have an accurate understanding of the areas of strength and weakness in the school. These are clearly outlined in the detailed school self-evaluation document, which, in turn, informs a well-focused school improvement plan. While the written targets that are set in this plan are clear, leaders should ensure that these targets consistently reflect the high expectations seen in practice.
- The quality of the early years provision has improved markedly over the past two years. Leaders are careful to establish what children are able to do on entry to the school. The early years teacher uses this information extremely well to plan learning that enables children to learn with confidence in activities that link closely to early learning goals. Children make excellent progress from their individual starting points because of the high-quality teaching and support that they receive.
- Achievement in the phonics screening check has been high since 2013. These high standards are being maintained.
- Attainment at key stage 1 dipped in 2013, as did achievement in key stage 2 in 2014. School leaders analysed the reasons why this happened and took effective actions which have led to significant improvements in outcomes at each key stage. For example, greater emphasis on the way that writing and mathematics are taught has considerably improved the progress that pupils are able to make in these subjects. Leaders track the progress of each pupil with great care. Accurate school assessment information and evidence seen in pupils' work indicates that this trajectory of improvement in achievement is continuing.
- School leaders, under governors' careful scrutiny, make very effective use of the funding to support pupils who are disadvantaged and also pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Through the individual support these pupils receive from their teachers and well-trained teaching assistants they make good progress.
- You and your governors are committed to providing opportunities for leaders to develop their knowledge and skills. For example, subject leaders work regularly with colleagues from other schools to help them to develop their leadership skills. Consequently, these leaders are increasingly effective in their work. They lead their areas with infectious enthusiasm. Subject leaders have worked well with you to ensure that the curriculum is rich and varied. Pupils are interested and enthused by the varied topic work, such as the Africa topic that they are currently studying. Teachers and subject leaders are encouraged to innovate in the way they plan and deliver their

subjects. For example, pupils explained how they enjoy the 'active mathematics' lessons which combine sporting, orienteering and mathematics skills.

- Middle leaders provide a range of appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop their sporting and artistic skills through the provision of clubs such as the art, athletics, rugby and football clubs. These are well attended and highly thought of by pupils. Vibrant wall displays throughout the school reflect the wide variety of sports, cultures and artists which pupils have the opportunity to study.
- Pupils have a rapidly developing understanding of life in modern Britain. They spoke with enthusiasm about the democratically elected school council and the work that it has done to improve facilities at the school. Pupils develop important communication and leadership skills through the school's 'young leaders' mentoring programme. They are also able to gain awareness of the importance of their role in the local community through the hosting of events for local residents, taking part in the local music festival and taking part in a range of sporting activities.
- You are successfully working with a range of external agencies as part of your strategy to improve the school. As part of the Brentwood Collaborative Partnership, staff have had the opportunities to attend appropriate training and to moderate assessments of pupils' work. Essex local authority provides appropriate support, for example, by carrying out regular visits to assess the quality of education that is being provided at the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most effective practice in teaching, learning and assessment, evident in the early years, key stage 1 and some key stage 2 classes, is replicated elsewhere
- all teachers provide frequent opportunities for pupils to make even better progress across all subjects.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Lucas
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you, your deputy headteacher, four middle leaders, six governors and a group of 12 pupils. Together, with you and your deputy headteacher, I observed pupils at work in a range of classes as well as those taking part in a variety of after-school clubs. I also spoke with pupils at playtime. I carried out a scrutiny of pupils' work in their books and learning journals. A range of documents were reviewed, including those relating to governance, school self-evaluation, improvement planning, assessment, behaviour and safeguarding. The views expressed in eight staff responses, 35 pupil responses and 44 parent responses to Ofsted surveys were considered. I also took into account the views expressed in one email from a parent and one email from a governor.