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Mrs Serena Williams
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Williams

Short inspection of Roach Vale Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 January 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection, despite there being several changes to the school staff. Following a period when governors were unable to recruit to the vacancy, you were without a deputy headteacher. Two assistant headteachers were appointed in 2014. There have also been several changes in staff, and due to recruitment difficulties, many classes have had numerous teachers during their time at Roach Vale. You and your staff have been determined to ensure that none of this has affected pupils' outcomes. You continue to foster excellent relationships with your staff, pupils and parents and remain committed to the school's motto: 'I can, you can, we can achieve.'

Behaviour and welfare of the pupils continues to be a key strength of the school. Pupils show care, consideration and respect for each other, supporting one another and demonstrating very positive attitudes to learning. They love coming to Roach Vale and think it is a 'fabulous' school. Of this, you and your staff must be very proud. Certainly the pupils are. 'One word cannot describe it well enough', said one pupil. Parents likewise recognise the good work that you do. One example among many was voiced by a parent who responded to Parent View, 'My son loves school and to my surprise is always really keen to go in. I can't really offer a more glowing endorsement than that!' You are in no small way responsible for such plaudits. You will undoubtedly be missed when you move on to pastures new in August 2017.

The school has a real buzz of enthusiasm and pupils are very keen to share their work with others and visitors. Pupils are involved in their own learning, challenge themselves and work well with others to solve problems. Two pupils eloquently explained how they were going to solve a problem about how much 1,000 grains of rice would weigh. The teacher had carefully selected this activity to suit the needs of these pupils who eagerly, methodically and with determination, carried out a practical activity to find an answer. This was but one example of how teachers know their pupils well and how they use the curriculum innovatively to deepen pupils' learning and encourage them to challenge themselves. 'That's what it is always like here', said one pupil. It was evident in the learning we observed that the vast majority of adults ask pupils challenging questions to elicit good-quality responses. Adults expect pupils to think carefully about what they are learning and to use the many prompts in the classroom to support them. Pupils say these help them, as do teachers' comments during lessons.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You have ensured that there is a culture that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Rigorous procedures are in place to ensure that visitors to the school are routinely checked and that records of pupils who leave the school at times other than the end of the school day are carefully maintained. Attendance is tracked and patterns of absence are recorded fully. The school works well with its families and an external agency to support vulnerable families whose attendance is not yet good. The impact of that work can be clearly seen. You have given the responsibility for pastoral care of pupils to your two assistant headteachers, who know the pupils very well. As a consequence, pupils say they feel well supported, know who to go to if they have a concern, and that they are safe and happy at school.

Inspection findings

- One of my key lines of enquiry was the progress the school has made since the previous inspection on developing pupils' writing skills in subjects other than English. It was clearly evident from my visit that pupils write for a variety of purposes and across myriad subjects. Written work on science, geography and history adorns the walls and is of very good quality. Teachers use innovative ways to encourage pupils to write with passion and to communicate their thoughts and feelings well. If this is not in descriptions of winter, it is in factual writing about how to make 'green fire' in science. When we looked at pupils' work in the books, it was evident that teachers expect the same high standard of writing in subjects such as religious education and history as they do in pupils' English books.
- The second line of enquiry related to progress since the previous inspection on ensuring that teachers are confident to make accurate assessments of pupils' work and to respond to individual pupils' needs during lessons. Although some teachers are still sometimes tentative in their assessments, they are all using every opportunity they can to address the needs of individuals and groups of

pupils. Regular assessments, book scrutinies and moderation of teachers' judgements are all helping to ensure that there is consistency across the school. The information that leaders gather about pupils' outcomes has developed since the previous inspection. The school's website gives parents clear guidance on how to understand the school's chosen system of assessment, and parents who responded to Parent View say they feel their children are making good progress. However, leaders at all levels need to ensure that all of the information is used to highlight gaps in pupils' learning and support pupils to enable them to catch up. By using this information more incisively leaders will be better able to celebrate the success of the actions they have taken and to evaluate accurately the impact their actions have had on pupils' outcomes.

- Another line of enquiry related to progress since the previous inspection in accelerating pupils' progress in mathematics at key stage 2, so that it is as good as in English. The proportion of pupils that achieved the expected standard in mathematics and made the expected progress in 2016 was broadly in line with the national average and above the school's results in reading. However, this is not yet mirrored across the school. Progress in mathematics of pupils in some classes is not yet as good as it is in reading and writing. You are aware of this and have put in place booster classes for some pupils, the impact of which you and your mathematics lead will continue to track carefully. From the work in pupils' books, it is clear that teachers' expectations of pupils' work are not consistently high. Nor do some teachers adhere to your expectation that pupils routinely respond to the guidance they give them on how to improve their work. Some of your teachers make sure that pupils have opportunities to reflect on their learning and respond to how to improve their work. As a consequence, pupils' progress in these classes is faster and more consistent.
- A key line of enquiry related to the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, given that these were not as good as they could have been in 2016 for the early years and the end of key stage 2. The provision for disadvantaged pupils across the school is good. Evidence seen during the inspection showed that disadvantaged pupils currently at the school make at least expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics from their varying starting points. This group's progress is tracked well and the impact of actions taken is recorded well. However, this information is not yet on the school's website as is the requirement.
- The proportion of children who achieve a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year continues to be below the national average. A key line of enquiry, therefore, related to why this should be so. Evidence seen during the inspection showed that most children make good progress from their varying starting points, which are often low. The good level of development outcomes has continued to rise since the previous inspection and evidence suggests that it is set to do so again in 2017. Children are encouraged to work on their own, with others and with adults both inside and outside of the classroom. They have settled well since September and play well with each other. One small group of children did an impromptu 'theatre' performance of 'Three Little Pigs' for their classmates during my visit. It was a joy to see and the children loved it!
- How well governors hold leaders to account for the outcomes of all pupils, and in particular the most vulnerable pupils, was my last line of enquiry. The outcomes of disadvantaged pupils and poor attendance of some vulnerable pupils ensured

that I look closely at this area. Governors are committed to the school, take their responsibilities seriously and know the school well. They are involved in evaluating the school's strengths and areas for development and are each assigned to classes to keep a close eye on how well pupils respond to their learning. Governors challenge leaders about pupil outcomes, but acknowledge that they have not routinely asked for regular assessment information about all groups of pupils in all year groups. They work with an external adviser who supports them in conducting the process of performance management of the headteacher. Governors responsible for ensuring that appropriate pay rewards are awarded do so with diligence and tenacity. The governing body is working closely with an adviser from Essex County Council to recruit a new headteacher when you retire at the end of this academic year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- in line with school policy, pupils respond to teachers' guidance on how pupils can improve their work in order to maximise the progress they make in writing and mathematics
- leaders make more efficient use of assessment information so that all groups of pupils across the school achieve the best outcomes they can
- leaders at all levels precisely evidence the impact of decisions they make on pupils' outcomes
- teachers' expectations of presentation of work in pupils' books, particularly in mathematics, are consistently high.

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. 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 and your two assistant headteachers to discuss progress since the previous inspection. I held a meeting with your middle leaders who have responsibility for leading English, mathematics and the early years, to discuss outcomes for children and pupils and the impact of decisions leaders have made. I met with a group of governors including the chair of the governing body, a representative of the local authority, and a group of pupils selected by you from all year groups. I scrutinised a variety of sources of information including your records of monitoring and evaluation, minutes of governing body meetings, and the school's

assessment information for all year groups. I also scrutinised the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, the records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children, and information relating to attendance. We both undertook observations of learning across the school, viewed work in pupils' books, and spoke with pupils about their learning during lessons.