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Mrs Alison Kerrell
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Dear Mrs Kerrell

Short inspection of Great Bardfield 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There is still work to do to raise outcomes further, especially for the most able pupils and to improve the analysis of pupils' progress. However, it is clear that Great Bardfield is a good and improving school.

Pupils learn in a friendly, caring and supportive environment that enables them to develop positive attitudes towards learning and achieving their best. All of the pupils I spoke to enjoy coming to school and are proud of their school.

Many changes have occurred since you took up the post of headteacher three years ago. Your passion for providing pupils with a high-quality education and your insightful leadership have brought about noteworthy improvements to the school. You have galvanised staff and there is a strong sense of teamwork throughout the school. Parents are complimentary about the changes you have introduced and the leadership of the school.

You have a clear vision which is shared by all staff and is clearly communicated to pupils and parents. Your introduction of the core skills, the 5Rs (respect, resilience, reflective, responsibility and resourceful) that underpin your school values are understood by the pupils and fully embedded in the work of the school. Walking around the school, I witnessed many examples of pupils showing respect for one another and for adults, and resilience when attempting difficult work.

Areas of development from the previous inspection have been successfully tackled. For example, teachers are now providing pupils with work at the right level, the assessment policy is helping pupils to improve the quality of their work, and achievement in mathematics is improving. You have made effective use of the schools in the local partnership and local authority to support leaders' evaluation of the school's work. As a result, your self-evaluation and school improvement plans are detailed and sharply focused on the right priorities.

Raising pupils' expectations of what can be achieved is one of your key priorities. Our visits to the classrooms provided plenty of evidence of pupils working hard to reach the higher levels of attainment. This is largely because pupils know that making mistakes is part of their learning. I saw many examples of pupils persevering with their learning, helping one another and being confident to ask for help when needed; for example, a group of pupils in Year 4 when solving greater-than and less-than fractions.

Another area of improvement you identified as a priority was the quality of teaching and outcomes for children in the early years. The changes you have made to improve teaching and learning have resulted in an increasing number of children reaching a good level of development. Children learn in a stimulating environment; they are given interesting and challenging learning activities. Adults support children well to extend their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

Procedures for keeping pupils safe are robust. Leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding procedures meet the latest guidance and that staff are appropriately trained. You ensure that all adults working with pupils have been subject to the appropriate pre-employment checks. Governors and senior leaders regularly update policies and ensure that staff are aware of the latest guidance. This is a small school and staff know the pupils well and are therefore quick to identify the indicators of safeguarding concerns. Record-keeping of actions taken when a concern is raised are fit for purpose and the school provides effective support for vulnerable pupils.

Relationships between pupils are generally good. They show respect for one another, so bullying is rare. Pupils have confidence that, should bullying occur, adults will take swift action. The strategies you have introduced to make pupils think about the impact of their behaviour on others have contributed to these good relationships. Records indicate there are fewer incidents of pupils falling out in the last year. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations, such as on the roads and when using the internet. The website provides helpful advice for parents on internet safety and workshops for parents are run annually. Most parents agree that their child is safe in school and well looked after.

Inspection findings

- To establish whether the school remains good, one of my key lines of enquiry was about the progress of most-able pupils, especially in mathematics. The results in 2016 suggested that most-able pupils made less progress in mathematics than in reading and writing. You agreed and told me that the mathematics leader has introduced a new mathematics curriculum that now provides pupils with challenging and interesting work.
- Visiting mathematics lessons, I found pupils concentrating on work that helps them to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills. However, there are times when teachers are not providing pupils with the opportunity to extend their learning by solving a wider range of problems or by explaining the methods they have used.
- Pupils' books indicate the most able pupils continue to make good progress in writing and reading. The most able pupils who read to me did so with confidence, fluency and expression.
- My second line of enquiry was about the effectiveness of school leaders, including governors, in evaluating the impact of their work, especially the impact of pupil premium funding on disadvantaged pupils. I found the school has a well-structured approach to assessing and monitoring pupils' progress.
- Progress information is used well by subject leaders and classroom teachers to provide support for pupils who are falling behind in their learning and to make curriculum changes; for example, the introduction of morning spellings, a new approach to teaching phonics and the new mathematics curriculum.
- The impact of individual support is monitored carefully and amended as required. However, leaders are not evaluating the impact of actions on the different groups of pupils from their starting points in order to fully judge the success of these actions.
- The pupil premium funding is used appropriately to support disadvantaged pupils. Work in pupils' books indicates that these pupils are making good progress in a range of subjects. The impact of the actions taken to support individuals is reviewed by senior leaders and the governor responsible for the pupil premium funding twice a year, to ensure that the grant is being spent on the most effective strategies.
- From my discussion with representatives from the governing body, I found them to be proactive in checking the impact of school strategies on pupils' outcomes. Governors are rigorous in monitoring the impact of pupil premium funding.
- My final line of enquiry was to look at whether pupils have the opportunity to write across a range of subjects. Evidence from pupils' books in all year groups indicates that pupils have the opportunity to write across a range of subjects and for different purposes. However, not all teachers have the same high expectations regarding the quality of work in these subjects as they do in English and mathematics as work is often incomplete.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they improve the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes by:
 - ensuring that the work provided for the most able pupils enables them to reach higher levels of understanding
 - making sure teachers have the same high expectations of pupils' work in other subjects as are evident in mathematics and English
- leaders and managers further develop their analysis of pupils' progress to include different groups of pupils from their starting points.

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

Caroline Pardy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you, the deputy headteacher, the mathematics leader and five members of the governing body. We conducted a tour of the school together and visited all classes to see pupils and staff at work. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school and during lessons and met with a group of pupils from Years 5 and 6. Together with the deputy headteacher, I looked at samples of pupils' work across a range of subjects. I listened to a group of pupils read. I also looked at a number of documents, including information about pupils' progress, your school self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, documents relating to safeguarding and information posted on the school website. I considered the views of 54 parents who replied to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, which included 15 free-text responses, and the 68 responses to the school's recent parent survey.