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Nadia McIntosh
Headteacher
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Dear Ms McIntosh

Short inspection of Richard Atkins Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 11 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 March 2012.

This school continues to be good.

You provide strong, confident leadership, ably supported by the deputy headteacher and by other leaders in the school. Parents, governors and teachers recognise that the relatively new leadership team has faced and dealt with many challenges since the previous inspection to secure good teaching, learning and assessment. In particular, you have recruited and retained teachers who are reflective and highly committed to improving their skills. This means that, after a dip in performance, the school is now securing good outcomes for pupils.

You have identified the right priorities for the school and have acted on them rigorously. You have used support from the local authority and from the schools within The Windmill Cluster well in order to develop leadership at all levels and to improve teaching across the school. This has had a positive impact on pupils' progress, particularly since September 2016.

You responded swiftly and effectively to the drop in the standards attained by the pupils who left the school in 2016. You were incisive in identifying specific issues which led to pupils not achieving as well as you had expected. You took swift action to improve teaching. As a result, pupils currently in Year 6 are making good progress from their starting points. They are working at or above age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics.

The quality of teaching is good. Leaders support teachers in using information about pupils' progress to inform lesson planning.

The school's assessment system provides accurate information on how pupils are doing. Most pupils across key stage 2 are making strong progress and are on track to achieve better outcomes by the end of the year in reading, writing and mathematics. In Year 6, many pupils have made rapid progress. This is because leaders have helped teachers to reflect carefully on the 2016 outcomes and have adapted their teaching and their provision accordingly. For example, you ensured that teachers gave pupils a range of opportunities to develop their skills at writing their responses to questions about their reading, because this was something that pupils did not do well in the 2016 assessments. Disadvantaged pupils in key stage 2 are now making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The most able pupils are making better progress in mathematics and reading. This is because teachers have better information about pupils' previous achievement and can plan to challenge them more effectively.

The new mathematics curriculum has helped teachers to give good guidance to pupils during lessons. Teachers pick up pupils' misconceptions quickly so that additional targeted teaching can help them catch up. As a result, pupils who are at risk of falling behind are quickly identified and given support to help them make stronger progress than previously. Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils, including the most able, has been targeted effectively so that any pupil who is at risk of underachieving is identified quickly and given appropriate help. As a result, disadvantaged pupils are making stronger progress than they have previously.

You have created an impressive climate for learning across the school. Pupils are confident that they will be successful learners. They take risks, 'have a go' and rise to the challenges from their teachers. This is because relationships between adults and pupils are strong. Teachers adopt a firm but fair approach and pupils consistently respond very well to this. Pupils are keen to share their achievements and are proud of their school. They are happy, welcoming young British citizens.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils feel safe and are kept safe at school. Staff are well trained in all aspects of safeguarding. They adhere to the latest guidance and are vigilant. Pupils' well-being is at the centre of the school's work. Pupils trust the adults that work with them and feel safe in their care.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality. The school is transferring its record-keeping to a new electronic system which will capture all the information about the provision for vulnerable pupils in one place. During this transition period the headteacher and assistant headteacher for inclusion are making sure that records are kept up to date and accessible to those who need them.

The school ensures that all recruitment checks on staff are thorough.

The headteacher and assistant headteacher have detailed knowledge of individual pupils who are at risk or vulnerable.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have improved the teaching of reading in key stage 2 rapidly and significantly this year. Training and professional development has led to improvements in teachers' subject knowledge. Leaders have invested in good-quality resources and books. The new library is highly valued by pupils, who talk with enthusiasm about their weekly visits to change their books. Pupils and parents have responded well to the new home-school reading records. Pupils enjoy the rewards they receive for reading regularly. Parents say the changes to how reading is taught have made 'a real difference'.
- As a result of these initiatives, pupils in key stage 2 are now making stronger progress in reading than previously. They look set to achieve outcomes in line with those expected nationally in the summer tests. Disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, are making much stronger progress than they did in the past. The most able pupils have made at least good progress in reading, writing and mathematics this year. Where teaching is strongest, some of them have made rapid progress, particularly in writing and mathematics.
- Even so, there is scope for further improvement. Occasionally, teachers' questioning during reading activities does not enable pupils to gain a deeper understanding of the text they are reading. Teachers are not equally confident in selecting books which challenge pupils to help them make rapid progress. Sometimes pupils choose books to read which are too easy for them, although they value guidance on which books to choose when they receive it.
- Leaders and teachers have worked hard to implement the mathematics curriculum effectively. Pupils' books and the work seen in some classes show very rapid progress for all ability groups, reflecting strong teaching. Disadvantaged pupils' books show that they make strong progress. Leaders agree that they need to share the most effective practice so that progress is uniformly rapid across key stage 2. They also recognise the need for teachers to have the same high expectations of the presentation of pupils' mathematics work.
- Outcomes at the end of the early years foundation stage have improved over the past three years but are still below average, particularly for disadvantaged children. Children's achievement by the end of the Reception Year is just below the national average, reflecting good progress from starting points which are typically below those seen nationally. In 2016, leaders and teachers were successful in ensuring that outcomes for boys improved significantly. Sharp analysis of pupils' achievement information identified areas of learning where boys had been unsuccessful. They then adjusted their curriculum and provision to ensure that both took account of gaps in boys' learning as well as capturing their interest.

- The curriculum in the early years inspires and enthuses children. For example, during the inspection boys and girls, including those who are disadvantaged, in the Reception classes applied their knowledge of letters and sounds to write independently about pirates. This writing was above the standard typically expected for their age and shows that they have made rapid progress since joining the school.
- Leaders responsible for the early years provision are enthusiastic and keen to improve provision further. They plan to improve the Reception outdoor area so that it is as inspirational as the Nursery outside space. Teachers agree that they could offer further opportunities in the outdoor spaces for children to apply their early number, reading and writing skills.
- The membership and structure of the governing body have changed significantly since the previous inspection. Governors have supported the headteacher well through a turbulent period of staff changes. They challenge the work of the school and seek clarity from leaders about the impact of spending on pupils' progress. However, they are not yet fully involved in steering the strategic direction of the school. They are well informed about the progress of different groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged.
- In 2016 overall attendance was slightly below average and the persistent absence rate was well above the national average. School records show that this was due to a number of families taking holidays during term time. Leaders have secured support from the educational welfare officer and have put a range of actions in place to deter parents from taking pupils out of school during term time. As a result, there are some early signs of improvement this academic year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should :

- review the use of the Reception outdoor area to maximise its impact on children's progress so that a higher proportion of them achieve a good level of development and are ready for the challenges of the Year 1 curriculum
- increase the role of governance in evaluating key aspects of the school's work and influencing its strategic direction
- support teachers to develop their questioning skills and their confidence in selecting texts that challenge pupils and help them to make sustained and rapid progress in reading across key stage 2
- ensure that the high-quality teaching of mathematics, which leads to rapid progress in some classes, is shared across the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Ruth Dollner
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I agreed to prioritise the following areas with the school at the start of the inspection:

- the actions taken by leaders to support teachers in improving children's achievement by the end of the Reception Year, particularly that of boys
- the actions leaders have taken to ensure that pupils who are currently in key stage 2 are making at least good progress in reading and mathematics, particularly the most able readers and the pupils who achieved less well than others when they left key stage 1
- the effectiveness of safeguarding in the school
- how governors ensure that the spending of the pupil premium funding is improving outcomes in reading and mathematics for disadvantaged pupils.

During the inspection I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, your senior leaders and three of your governors. I spoke with a representative of the local authority. I visited all classrooms with you or your senior leaders and observed learning. I talked to pupils in lessons and as they moved around the building. I heard pupils read and talked to them about their reading experiences in school. I evaluated recent information about pupils' achievement. I scrutinised a large sample of pupils' books across key stage 2 to find out about the progress they have made this year. I looked at your records for keeping pupils safe, your policies and other documents. I spoke with parents at the start of the day and considered the 23 responses to the online parent questionnaire. I reviewed the responses to staff and pupil questionnaires.