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8 March 2017

Mrs Joanne Banks
Headteacher
The Richard Heathcote Community Primary School
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Dear Mrs Banks

Short inspection of The Richard Heathcote Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 February 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 October 2012.

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 continues to provide a vibrant, well-ordered environment in which pupils and staff work hard and enjoy positive, productive relationships. One parent's view of the school is typical of the majority: 'This is a lovely little community school. Staff are extremely hardworking and also caring in their roles... I appreciate that we are very lucky.' Pupils, too, know that this is a good school; they are proud of it and they recognise that their teachers look after them, keep them safe and work hard to help them progress in their learning.

You, your leadership team and your governors have a very accurate view of the school: you know its strengths and those aspects that still need further development. You use a wide range of data and information, and work with a number of external partners, to enable you to assess how well the school is doing and where you need to focus your efforts. Since the previous inspection, you have made improvements across the full range of the school's work and these are evident in the school itself, in pupils' books and in their educational outcomes.

At the last inspection, you were asked to improve the quality of teaching and raise rates of progress made by pupils by ensuring a more rapid pace of learning in the early years and providing more focus on creative aspects of the curriculum and of knowledge and understanding of the world.

In response, you have introduced a new electronic assessment system which covers all aspects of the early years areas of learning and which highlights clearly where there are gaps in the teaching or provision. This system is supporting the adults to undertake more accurate observations of children's development. It also enables you to provide accurate and detailed termly assessment updates to parents which complement the weekly, individual journals. The teaching in the early years is focused on developing in children the necessary range of skills, knowledge and understanding across all required areas of learning. The daily continuous provision is purposeful and focused, often reinforcing the adult-led teaching of early reading, writing and mathematics. You start to teach phonics and early reading skills in Nursery and build upon this good base in Reception and Year 1. As a result of these developments, outcomes at the end of the early years have been above average for the past three years, especially for disadvantaged pupils.

You were also asked to ensure that there was sufficient challenge for all pupils. You responded immediately to this challenge by reviewing and revising the whole-school marking policy. Pupils to whom I spoke explained how teachers' marking helps them to improve their work. You have raised the profile of the core skills: reading, writing and mathematics, and reviewed and strengthened the school's assessment policy. As a result of these developments, teaching practice, teacher expectations and implementation of school policies are more consistent across the year groups. Consequently, overall educational outcomes have improved, especially for disadvantaged pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have maintained the positive safeguarding culture identified at the last inspection. Pupils spoken to, and parents, overwhelmingly agree that the school is a safe place to be. You place a strong focus on developing the school's 'open door' family environment and on knowing your children and families well. To this end, your staff intervene at the earliest opportunities to tackle any possible emerging issues facing a child. As the designated safeguarding lead officer, you review weekly the cases of children about whom you are concerned. In addition to the services on offer in school, you purchase external support services, such as an attendance and educational welfare service and a mental health counselling service, to support pupils and families in need. As a result, you have not needed to escalate many referrals to external agencies but when these do occur appropriate actions are taken. Occasionally, the record-keeping for such cases is not as tight as it could be. For example, in the case of the outsourced services, the school should keep, or be provided with, a record of contact with pupils that ties in with the individual pupil's attendance record.

All policy documents are compliant, thorough and understood by staff and governors. The results of staff surveys reveal that staff have confidence in the leadership and management of the school to keep pupils safe. Correct recruitment checks have been carried out for staff, volunteers and governors.

Those pupils to whom I spoke overwhelmingly reported that they feel safe. They told me about the work they do in school on e-safety and bullying, for example. They explained that they cover specific safeguarding themes through assemblies, special weeks, in lessons, and in their displays. Behaviour for learning in lessons is strong. As you and I walked around the school, I noted the very strong work ethic evident in lessons where pupils were engaged and well behaved. In group sessions, pupils acted in a mature and sensible fashion. I reported back to you on the discussion that I had with a group of your Year 6 pupils about British Values and different families. They were a credit to you, your staff and their parents.

Inspection findings

- Outcomes in 2016, at the end of key stage 2, for disadvantaged pupils were strong. This was due to the combination of your focused attention on this group and on the learning of individuals within the group. Your attention has been strengthened by the new, sharper assessment processes that you put in place following the last inspection.
- In contrast, you readily acknowledge that progress for the other 2016 key stage 2 pupils, generally, was not as good as it could have been. Although more pupils reached the expected level than those nationally, too few attained at higher levels. During the years immediately following the previous inspection, more pupils did gain the higher Levels 3 and 5. However, with the introduction of the new national curriculum, the proportions attaining at the higher levels stalled. You accept that the school had underestimated the additional rigour and challenge posed by new national curriculum programmes of study.
- In reviewing the school's provision for reading, to explore this issue, it was evident that it does not yet meet the national curriculum requirements in full and to the level needed to challenge more able pupils fully. Pupils do not read widely across the curriculum or across the full range of genres. Few links are made between the reading provision on offer and the subject and topics within the rest of the curriculum. In short, the range of books that pupils read is too narrow. It is almost exclusively modern, narrative fiction.
- However, your pupils do love reading. They read a good volume of books. The profile of reading ages across the school is strong. Reading ages are monitored by staff and used to identify where additional intervention is needed.
- Writing in books shows clear evidence of progress over time across year groups. There is strong evidence of the vast majority of pupils making good progress in writing. The school's good attention to teaching spelling, grammar and punctuation is paying dividends.
- You have recognised the need to review the provision in mathematics to ensure that it, too, covers the full requirements of the programmes of study so that all pupils, especially the most able, can achieve highly. You teach the bar method as a visual way of solving calculations and solving problems and are aware of the need to help pupils develop greater mastery of the subject. Currently, you are focused on enabling pupils to become fluent in their multiplication tables.

- In key stage 1, in 2016, more pupils than nationally attained the standard expected for their age but fewer attained the greater depth, especially those pupils who left the early years having exceeded the good level of development in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Phonics, early reading, writing and mathematics are taught well in key stage 1 so that the vast majority of pupils reach the expected standard.
- All pupils follow the basic phonic reading scheme, then choose from the graded book-band scheme until they complete this in key stage 2 and are left to become 'free readers'. As it is the most able readers who finish the scheme quickly, they are more at risk of underachieving without very clear guidance and oversight of the material they are reading.
- In 2016, the proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities who were persistently absent was greater than the national figure. You have tackled this issue through your more robust focus on attendance. Attendance has improved slightly, year on year; the proportion of persistent absence has decreased as has the number of pupils who are persistently absent. The pupils and families most at risk of poor attendance are well known to you and you work closely with the attendance service to minimise their absence.
- In a very small number of cases, there are some registration coding errors for absence.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the reading and mathematics provision for most-able pupils more closely reflects the national curriculum programmes of study, and provides a greater depth of challenge and rigour
- the school receives records for outsourced services for individual pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Angela Westington
Senior, Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, you, your deputy headteacher and I agreed the key lines of enquiry that we would pursue during the day. We toured the whole school and observed parts of lessons in all year groups, including the early years. We looked at pupils' books in these lessons and I heard pupils read. We focused particularly on how well the school extends the higher attaining pupils in reading because, as part of my pre-inspection preparation, I had noted that the school allows pupils to become 'free readers' once they finish the school's banded-book scheme.

I met with you, your deputy, another member of your senior team and governors. I also met with groups of pupils and some parents at the start of the school day. I reviewed a range of documentation, your school website and your policies and statements.

I read staff and parent responses to your own school questionnaires and to Ofsted's Parent View survey. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire. There were 31 responses to Parent View, including 27 free-text responses.