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22 June 2017

Mrs Emma Vincent
Executive Headteacher
R A Butler Junior School
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Dear Mrs Vincent

Short inspection of R A Butler Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 6 June 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 July 2013.

This school continues to be good

Although there have been significant changes in leadership and staffing since the previous inspection, the good quality of education in the school has been maintained. Your governing body has provided strong leadership during this time and teachers have worked effectively to ensure that outcomes for pupils have remained good. In 2016, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected and higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2 was well above that found nationally. In fact, the progress that pupils made from key stage 1 to key stage 2 in mathematics and reading placed R A Butler Junior School among the top 10% of schools nationally. Overall, outcomes in writing were in line with other schools nationally, although your disadvantaged pupils did not make good progress in their writing.

You have been in post since September 2016 and have united the staff in your drive to raise expectations and improve outcomes for all groups of pupils, especially for those who are disadvantaged. Your team has quickly gained the support of parents. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, feel that the school is led and managed well and many commented on the welcoming and open ethos you have created. They feel that their children are thriving due to the enthusiasm and care of the teachers. The care provided for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities also ensures that they make good progress from their varied starting points. These pupils' needs are understood well by your inclusion manager, who regularly reviews the impact of support and the progress that pupils are making.

Pupils told me how proud they are of their school and how much they enjoy their lessons. The positive relationships between staff and pupils are evident in every classroom. Pupils' enthusiasm for learning is also demonstrated through high attendance figures and positive behaviour in lessons. Pupils are polite and well mannered, welcoming towards visitors and speak with confidence and clarity about their learning. Pupils were confined indoors on the day of my visit because of heavy and persistent rain, yet their behaviour in lessons remained focused and they coped sensibly with the inevitable restrictions at breaktimes.

In your short time as headteacher, you have deliberately sought out and listened to the views of staff and pupils. One result of this has been a change to the behaviour management system, through the introduction of the '6Rs' that now underpin teachers' expectations and are clearly understood and supported by all. Pupils spoke confidently of the importance of respectful relationships – one of your 6Rs – and I saw how time is given in both lessons and assemblies for pupils to reflect on their learning, as well as national events such as the June general election. Teachers frequently refer to the 6Rs in lessons to reinforce good learning behaviour and pupils reported to me that they feel behaviour has 'got even better with the 6Rs'.

You have rigorously challenged weaker teaching and, although this has led to some staff leaving the school, the result is a far more consistent quality of teaching across year groups and classes than at the time of the previous inspection. At the same time, you have created a climate in which staff are encouraged and trusted to try out new ideas. This year, teachers have been trialling different ways of giving written feedback to pupils to help them improve their work. Although in the short term this has meant that there is inconsistency in the method and, at times, the quality of feedback to pupils, it has led to some very effective practices which will be formally incorporated into a whole-school policy for the new academic year. It has also resulted in pupils becoming more adept at talking about what they are learning, rather than simply what they are doing, particularly in some Year 6 classes.

Safeguarding is effective

The care provided for all pupils, but especially those who are more vulnerable, is a strength of the school. You and other leaders ensure that systems for recording and tracking concerns about pupils are robust, and that staff are well informed and trained about new safeguarding guidance through regular training and updates. Staff understand their responsibilities and know what to do if they have any concerns. Pupils who spoke to me during the inspection said that they feel safe, and parents overwhelmingly agree that their children are kept safe in the school. Pupils had a good understanding of what bullying is and the different forms it can take, including name-calling and deliberately excluding someone. Pupils said that it does happen occasionally in school, but they are confident that it will be taken seriously if they report it. The work that you have done this year with pupils to make it acceptable to tell someone if something is wrong is starting to pay real dividends; all pupils said that there is at least one person in school they would talk to if they

are worried or concerned about anything.

Your governors actively fulfil their statutory duties to ensure that pupils are safe in school. For example, they ensure that all necessary checks are carried out on new staff and governors receive regular reports and updates on any safeguarding concerns.

Inspection findings

- To determine whether the school remained good, one of my main lines of enquiry was about writing. This was an area for improvement after the previous inspection, and outcomes in writing are still not as strong as in reading and mathematics. During my visits to classrooms, I saw how teachers are encouraging pupils to explore and imitate language orally before moving to the written word. In one Year 4 lesson, I saw how this particularly engaged boys, who enjoyed making up movements to go with the words they would later be using in their own writing. In another Year 4 class, pupils whose first language was not English were also using this method to help them develop their understanding of new words.
- During writing activities, teachers and pupils also develop writing toolkits together which, when displayed in the classrooms, provide reminders of the expectations of particular writing styles. These are used effectively by pupils to support their independent writing. Evidence in pupils' books shows that most pupils have made good progress in their writing over this year and some pupils are making exceptional progress.
- Another key area I investigated was how well you are meeting the needs of the disadvantaged pupils at R A Butler. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils remains below the national average but is slowly increasing. Overall, your disadvantaged pupils make progress in line with other pupils nationally in reading and mathematics but, in 2016, a smaller proportion reached the expected standard by the end of key stage 2 and none reached the higher standard. The progress your disadvantaged pupils made in their writing in 2016 placed you in the lowest 10% of schools nationally.
- Since September 2016, the barriers that prevent each disadvantaged pupil from reaching their potential have been identified, and teachers have put strategies in place to support their learning. Extra support is proving effective in enabling these pupils to access learning more easily. The learning mentor works successfully with individuals to build independence, resilience and other skills that they need to be successful in lessons. Although more time is needed to evaluate the long-term impact on outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, information provided by you shows that, in some year groups, the gaps in progress and attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their peers are already diminishing rapidly.
- I also wanted to look at the opportunities you provide for pupils to excel in subjects beyond English and mathematics. Pupils told me that personal, social and health education, physical education and art are very popular. The vibrant displays of their art work around school clearly demonstrate not only the diversity of art that they are exposed to, but also the high standard of work they produce

in response to this. However, work in science books, and history and geography topic books, is not of the same standard as in English and mathematics books. Too often in these lessons, teachers give pupils the same activities regardless of their ability. Pupils have too few opportunities to apply their writing and mathematics skills in other subjects.

- Both in physical education lessons and in activities outside the school day, the number of sports available for pupils to have a go at and to compete in is impressive. There was a lively before-school 'boxercise' session on the day of my visit and, this term, archery, lacrosse and curling are examples of some of the activities available in addition to more traditional sports. Your sports coach also provides specialist provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils have opportunities to develop their musical skills through music lessons as well as by participating in the school orchestra, choir and brass band. Pupils were also excited to tell me about their auditions for 'RAB's Got Talent' that they are preparing for at the moment.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the wider curriculum provides not only the right level of challenge for pupils but also opportunities for them to practise and apply the skills they learn in English and mathematics
- support for disadvantaged pupils enables them to catch up rapidly with their peers in Years 3 and 4 so that their overall attainment improves by the end of key stage 2.

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

Lesley Daniel
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During the inspection, I met with you, your inclusion manager, a representative from the local authority and members of the governing body. I spoke with other senior leaders and teachers from your English team.
- I visited classes with you, where I observed pupils learning and talked to them about their work and their school. In lessons, we looked at pupils' work in books to determine the quality of learning over time and the quality of learning across the curriculum. I spent time speaking informally with pupils in class and at lunchtime, as well as talking to a group of Year 3 pupils.

- I scrutinised the school's documents about safeguarding, including the record of checks on the suitability of each member of staff to work with young people, and the school's own evaluation of its performance and your plans for its improvement. I also considered the 86 responses to Parent View, which included 30 free text comments, and the views of the 43 staff members who completed the online survey.