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Mr Brian Combes
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Dear Mr Combes

Short inspection of Stanway Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 8 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

It is to your credit that you have maintained a stable staff for many years, although you now have one non-class-based deputy headteacher. This stability has enabled you and several members of your staff to support other schools both locally and further afield. It has also ensured that Stanway continues to reap the benefits from the very good links with other schools in the local consortium, particularly in developing good practice.

You have also engaged well with local initiatives to bring new teachers into the profession, supporting a number of newly qualified teachers along the way. Consequently, where any changes in teaching staff have been necessary, you have 'grown your own'. Not only have you nurtured this talent, but you have used it to great effect. You have done so, for example, in the leadership of mathematics and the learning innovation teams. This has undoubtedly had an impact on teachers' practice in the classroom and, ultimately, on pupils' learning behaviours. 'Be the best you can be' oozes from the pupils, staff and leaders alike.

One member of staff said, 'Stanway provides a positive learning environment for the children to thrive in, and I am so proud to be part of this school.' This sets the very positive scene for the school's imminent expansion that you and the local authority

have planned. You have already added an additional class to the Reception Year, creating two new single-age Reception classes. These children are clearly thriving and are very well prepared for Year 1. The addition of eight new classrooms will accommodate the growing numbers of families in Stanway and will enable you to have single-age classes throughout key stage 1 from September.

Pupils say they enjoy coming to their 'brilliant, kind, bully-free school'. They are polite, courteous and very welcoming to visitors. Pupils in the classrooms and those I met with as a group were positive in their responses about their work and the support they are given to achieve their best. The new behaviour system is working well and rewards pupils for behaving in a way that the school expects. Pupils talk openly about having the determination to succeed in their goals, being self-motivated and challenging themselves, all of which you have worked hard to improve. Such teacher feedback as, 'Can you try three more questions from the next two steps on the learning ladder?' is a common feature in pupils' work in their books. Pupils are, therefore, confident to talk about what they are learning, how they know they will be successful and how they can challenge themselves.

Pupils animatedly talked about their 'dream folders' and the encouragement they have all had to aspire to reach their goals. As part of your science work this week, the teacher asked all pupils to look back at their aspirations and see what they need to know in science related to their dream. For example, one pupil told me he wants to be a footballer when he grows up. He said, 'If I want to be a footballer, I know I need to understand about health and fitness, muscles and how my body works.' Pupils genuinely see their aspirations as attainable and that they are, to some extent, in charge of their own development.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good. I observed teaching and learning in mathematics in all classrooms, with particular emphasis on key stage 2. Pupils were all enjoying their learning and were involved in high-quality discussions. Teachers and teaching assistants were guiding pupils to challenge themselves or supporting them in their learning through sensitive and focused guidance. In one Year 5 and 6 class, pupils were measuring body angles using a diagram of a person taking part in sport. Pupils were immediately interested in this work which was astutely linked to the school's current science week.

Pupils accurately used protractors: they understood that when measuring angles of more than 180 degrees, additional skills were needed because of the limits of a protractor. In many classes, 'mathematics mastery work' was readily available and well accepted by pupils. This enabled them to consolidate their learning and use what they already know. For example, when finding missing angles in shapes, one pupil said, 'I know this one straightaway, as I know opposite angles in a parallelogram are the same.'

Together, we observed learning in English in all classes. Teachers planned interesting activities to grab pupils' attention. In three classes, a poem about a child not wanting to go to school elicited lively, reasoned discussion between Year 3 and

4 pupils. Teachers asked probing questions to see whether pupils had felt the same about not wanting to go somewhere or do something in their own lives. By doing so, pupils were encouraged to think about how they felt and, therefore, how the child in the poem might be feeling. 'Talk to your shoulder partners' brought about some discussion that belied the pupils' ages. 'I never want to go to the zoo when my friends suggest it, because I think keeping animals in cages is cruel,' said one pupil. Others set about persuading this pupil why a trip to the zoo is okay, which provided an insight into pupils' understanding of this moral dilemma. Providing challenge and encouraging pupils to be reflective in their learning runs through all classes, including key stage 1 and Reception. 'It's a bit tricky, but it's a good challenge,' said one pupil.

Pupils say they love reading. 'It allows you to walk in someone else's shoes,' said one young pupil. Listening to pupils read showed that from a very young age they clearly make good use of their phonic skills. Pupils talk about what they are reading and the authors they enjoy. One said, 'I like David Walliams because he is funny, doesn't go into too much detail, and makes his sentences quick and snappy.' Some older pupils are beginning to use such techniques in their writing. For example, 'They look around transfixed. Until Olivia breaks the silence by saying "Is this real?"' However, such examples are few and far between and do not reflect the quality of writing of all pupils. Having looked at their writing in their books, it is evident that teachers do not give pupils enough opportunities to write at length, and practise and apply their basic English skills. You recognise that this area is still being developed.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your governors take safeguarding very seriously. Relevant checks are made to ensure that adults are suitable to work with children. Pupils say that they feel safe and know who to go to if they have any worries. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online because you ensure that they take part in activities like 'Crucial Crew' and the internet safety day. You and your deputy headteacher are meticulous in recording any safeguarding concerns, and are tenacious in pursuing the support that pupils need. To ensure that you meet the needs of a growing number of pupils, you have appointed a well-being manager to oversee pupils' safety and welfare. This role is undoubtedly having an impact on many pupils, ensuring their success in school.

Parents are very supportive of the school and its nurturing ethos. One parent commented, 'The support we have received has been amazing, and still continues.' Attendance of the most vulnerable pupils is improving because you have raised parents' and pupils' awareness of the benefits of regular attendance. Almost all parents are very happy with the school and the way you and your staff care for their children. One said, 'My daughter loves attending school, her teachers are fully embracing and nurturing her thirst for learning.' This was a glowing endorsement of the school's ethos. Not all parents feel that the school informs them of how well their children are doing.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry. The first of these was the progress the school has made since the previous inspection in improving the quality of teaching so that pupils make good progress and work towards challenging targets. Much work has been done to ensure that there is consistency in expectations. Teachers have been made aware of those features of teaching that are 'non-negotiables' to support this. As a result, the majority of pupils across the school are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. This includes those pupils who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Pupils' positive attitudes to learning are demonstrated well in lessons, in the quality of their written work in mathematics and in their topic books. You accept that there is not always the same high expectation of pupils in their writing books. Teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to write at length, practise their basic skills and improve their presentation.
- Pupils' outcomes at the end of Year 6 last year were disappointing, especially those in reading and mathematics. We discussed the detailed scrutiny that you and your governors carried out in summer 2016 which found that some pupils were very close to meeting the expected standard but did not, which affected your outcomes. You, your special educational needs co-ordinator and the well-being manager did everything possible to ensure that pupils were supported in every way possible. Pupils' individual needs were catered for very well, but some pupils did not do as well on the day as they had throughout the year.
- Books and teaching seen during the inspection confirm that the renewed emphasis you have placed on ensuring that pupils' understanding of mathematics is strengthened is having a positive impact on their outcomes. In every class we visited together, we saw numerous examples of pupils extending their thinking, accepting the challenge and discussing their learning openly with their classmates and adults. As a result, pupils have a much better grasp of how to tackle problems, use their prior learning and a number of other strategies to support their learning. The leader of mathematics works closely with the senior leadership team to monitor and evaluate the impact of her actions. It was a delight to see pupils so engaged in their learning, and not giving up if they found something hard, or as one pupil said, 'It is a bit challenging, which is good!'
- Talking with pupils and looking at the school's own assessment information shows that pupils are on track to achieve well in reading in 2017. This is partly due to the fact that you have introduced a new guided reading system which is being taught by all staff. Pupils told me that they really enjoy reading 'because you can expand your imagination and read things that you never thought were possible'. However, the link between reading and writing is not yet well developed in some classes. Pupils, who clearly have the ability, are not always writing as 'authors' or taking as much pride in the presentation of their written work in English as they do in mathematics and topic work. You accept that teachers do not give pupils enough opportunities to write at length and to practise their basic skills.

- The teaching of reading in key stage 1 and in the early years is secure. The proportion of children who reach a good level of development in the Reception class is above the national average. They have a good grasp of early reading and writing and are well prepared for Year 1. As a consequence, phonics outcomes have increased and are now above the national average. Evidence presented to me shows that this is likely to be the case again in 2017.
- The second key line of enquiry related to the previous inspection but also to the school's recent emphasis on developing and sharing good practice to improve pupils' outcomes. You and your leaders are rightly proud of the work you have done to link with your local consortium of schools, and you recognise this has strengthened the professional development of all staff. You have clearly improved the learning environment, how teachers challenge pupils and how pupils take responsibility for their own learning. The 'learning innovation teams' have successfully led projects that in the last year have had a significant impact on pupils' attitudes to their learning.
- Leaders have worked with colleagues in a variety of schools to compare the outcomes of their work and to hone Stanway's practice. 'Success and achievement for all' is the school's motto, linked closely to enabling pupils to improve their own learning. I saw many examples of pupils having the courage to try new things out of their 'comfort zone' and to learn from their mistakes. Teachers subtly question and probe pupils to ensure that they understand what they have been asked to do, but also to think more deeply about their learning.
- Another key line of enquiry related to how well governors hold leaders to account for standards in the school. The discussion I had with your governors demonstrated to me that they know the school well, its strengths and areas of development, and how best to continue to improve it. Your governors clearly have many skills and work very well with staff. They regularly visit and support you and the leaders of the learning innovation teams in their work, monitoring standards as they go.
- Minutes of governors' meetings show that governors are tenacious and astute. They are not afraid to challenge leaders, and leaders respond with robust evidence. 'If the impact of what you are doing can't be measured, take it out of the plan' is governors' regular challenge to leaders. They ensure that additional funding is used effectively to support the most vulnerable pupils, and the impact of this funding is fully evaluated. The progress that the vast majority of these pupils make both academically, and particularly socially and emotionally, is considerable.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to write at length, practise their basic writing skills and improve their presentation
- the teaching of reading links directly with the work pupils do in their writing so that they see themselves as authors

- the school's communication with parents enables parents to have a clearer understanding of what their children achieve, and celebrates pupils' successes.

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 deputy headteacher, who is also the special educational needs coordinator and subject leader for English, to discuss progress since the previous inspection. I undertook observations of learning in all classes, many of which were with you. We viewed work in pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their learning during lessons. I also listened to pupils read during my time in lessons, and talked to them about their reading. I held meetings with a group of governors, including the vice-chair of the governing body, and a group of pupils. Together with the English and mathematics leaders, we scrutinised pupils' work in their English and mathematics books and looked at the school's own assessment information. We met with the three leaders of the learning innovation teams. I examined a range of sources of information, including your self-evaluation, the school's plans for improvement and records of behaviour. I also scrutinised the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures and records, the checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children, and information relating to attendance. I took into account the 39 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the 35 text messages from parents, as well as the 159 pupil responses and five staff survey responses.