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Miss Barber
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Dear Miss Barber

Short inspection of Rettendon Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 July 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 previous inspection. Rettendon Primary School is a small, welcoming village school where pupils are polite and confident learners. Pupils at Rettendon experience and enjoy a rich curriculum. For example, pupils were keen to tell me how much they enjoy regular swimming in the school's own swimming pool. Additionally, the twice a year 'genius' week gives pupils a chance to show off their creativity, planning and designing skills. They are given time to work on their chosen project until completion. This has proved very successful in building pupils' confidence and resilience and developing a positive attitude resulting in a 'can do' approach to their learning.

Pupils are well behaved and say that they are happy at Rettendon Primary School. Pupils achieve significantly above national expectations by the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. You consider the arrangement of the small cohorts creatively each year. Pupils are grouped in mixed ages for some teaching and learning, which has enabled pupils to be both supported and sufficiently challenged in lessons. For example, teachers plan the same activities for pupils who have the same starting points, regardless of their age. As a result, most pupils make good progress from their starting points.

However, you have recognised that not all teachers use the school's pupil assessment information precisely enough to plan activities which will move all

pupils' learning on quickly. This is an area you are currently developing with teachers. Signs of improvement are already being seen. The school's pupil assessment information shows more pupils this year achieving the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics.

Since the previous inspection, you have established strong partnerships with other schools. The work you have been undertaking with the Wickford Teaching Alliance has supported the school in checking and validating the accuracy of assessment of pupils' work. Additionally, the work with your partnership schools has helped you to develop a much more focused marking and feedback process, which is now embedded across the school. This is evidenced in pupils' work, where next steps for pupils to make progress are clearly identified and pupils respond appropriately.

You and governors share a clear vision about the school's future. You are aspirational for your pupils and want to provide the best education you can. You work closely together to ensure that all aspects of finance are fully explored and evaluated to maximise the difference that all funding makes to pupils, particularly pupil outcomes.

Parents, are generally very happy with what the school provides. One parent commented on Parent View, saying that all three children they have at the school are 'all extremely happy on a daily basis and the staff are all very approachable. The headteacher is always available if I have any question that need answering.' Parents I spoke to on the playground feel that communication from the school could be improved. Leaders have acknowledged this and have plans in place to consult with the school community on how best to address this concern early next term.

Safeguarding is effective.

Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are effective. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are well kept. All statutory checks on employees are undertaken. However, we agreed that the single central record could be organised better to make it easier to check details.

You have effective systems for staff to communicate concerns about children who may be at risk. Files are detailed and have a chronology so that events, actions and next steps can be easily identified and monitored.

The vast majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, say that their children are happy and safe in school. Pupils I spoke to told me that they feel safe and enjoy school. They could talk to me about lessons on e-safety and were very clear about what not to share online and knew what to do if they have concerns. Pupils were not aware of any incidents of bullying. Furthermore, incident logs show no recent serious incidents.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment of phonics. The proportion of pupils who achieved the expected level in the phonics screening test has been below national expectation for the last three years. To address this, you have ensured that there is a strong focus on developing teachers' skills in teaching phonics. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning has improved year on year.
- Pupils in key stage 1 benefit from focused teaching activities, where effective strategies are taught to support pupils with reading, spelling and pronunciation. Pupils are able to confidently identify and read words such as 'gymnastics' and spell and write words such as 'engine' and 'energy' independently. Each year group builds on this effective teaching and learning, demonstrated with good outcomes in spelling and reading at the end of Year 6.
- Pupils told me that they enjoy reading. Pupils in Year 2 were able to tell me what they considered to be the purpose of learning to read. One pupil said: 'to build up your knowledge', while another told me that she enjoyed imagining she was a character in the story. Pupils read very well and use effective strategies for reading unfamiliar words. Pupils who read in Year 3 are particularly confident and fluent, taking note of punctuation and considering the audience by adding intonation and expression. They read books that are sufficiently challenging and make good progress from their starting points. Pupils across the school achieve well in reading, exceeding national expectations at the end of Year 6.
- Although phonics this year has improved and is broadly in line with national expectation, you have identified that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the early years does not always provide children with sufficient opportunities to make the progress they should be making quickly enough in phonics. As a result, some children are not securely at the level they need to be when they move to Year 1. This is a priority for the school, which you are addressing through focused action plans and training.
- The previous inspection report highlighted the need for pupils to be able to apply skills learned in English and mathematics across a range of other subjects. Leaders and teachers have made good progress against this area for improvement. Pupils' work across all year groups demonstrates that they have access to a broad curriculum which provides a good balance of skills and knowledge. For example, in science pupils carry out investigations using fair tests. They use literacy skills for explanation of methods and conclusion. Opportunities to use mathematics skills, such as Venn diagrams for sorting and bar charts to interpret data to arrive at a reasoned conclusion, were evident across year groups. The level of challenge is high in Years 5 and 6, where pupils use mathematical skills to calculate the force required using an object's load and distance from its fulcrum.
- Pupils use their writing skills to write for a number of different purposes, covering a range of genres. Examples of fiction and non-fiction writing were evident in pupils' topic work when studying the River Nile and the theme 'Crime and Punishment', where pupils explored corruption and torture over several historical

time periods, challenging pupils to apply their skills further.

- Pupils' writing is mostly of a good standard, particularly in Years 5 and 6 where pupils demonstrate pride in the presentation of their work. However, this good level of presentation is not consistent across all year groups. In some classes, teachers' expectations are too low, and consequently work is poorly presented.
- Attendance for both disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities was below national expectation, therefore this became my final line of enquiry. You have effective procedures for following up poor attendance and were able to provide evidence of improved attendance for some of these pupils. You were able to provide evidence for individual pupils and good reasons for low attendance for pupils with complex medical needs.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching, learning and assessment of phonics is consistent across all year groups
- teachers use school's assessment information as well as what they know about pupils to focus teaching and learning so that more pupils make better than expected progress
- all teachers have high expectations in the presentation of pupils' work.

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

Cindy Impey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During the inspection, I met with you, and four governors.
- I visited Reception, Years 1 and 2. Current examples of children's work from every year group were looked at. I observed children's behaviour during activities and as they moved around the school.
- I listened to pupils read and spoke to them about their learning, safety and well-being.
- A number of documents were reviewed, including the single central record of employment checks, the school's self-evaluation, pupil assessment and progress

information.

- I also took account of the 52 responses to the online Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, completed by parents, and 50 text messages from parents.