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Miss Keeble
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Keeble

Short inspection of Vange Primary School and Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 4 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 April 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. In September 2016, you took up the post of headteacher after serving as deputy headteacher for a number of years. Consequently, you know the staff, parents and pupils well and have a good understanding of the local community needs. Parents are supportive of your leadership and the subsequent improvements being made. One parent typically commented, 'The new headteacher has had a positive influence on the school and is working side by side with the parents and 'Friends of Vange' to enhance the facilities and educational tools for the children.'

You have a clear and inspirational vision to re-establish the school at the centre of the community. You have been working effectively with other schools, for example piloting a programme which has enabled leaders to identify vulnerable families and better support all families.

Pupils at the school are happy and enjoy their learning. They particularly enjoy sport and the achievement of attaining the silver mark. The Year 6 pupils I spoke to told me that they like being part of a family school where all the teachers know the children well. They were excited about their next stage of education and feel that their experience at Vange Primary and Nursery School has prepared them well for Year 7.

Pupils' behaviour is generally good in lessons, and instances of low-level disruption are rare. However, some teachers do not have high enough expectations of the presentation of pupils' work in books. You agreed that this is a focus for the school, particularly with boys' writing. You have successfully found strategies which motivate and engage boys to produce well-presented, good-quality narratives at length. For example, the school's writing gallery exhibits a range of pupils' work. This demonstrates that pupils are able to present their work well when the expectation is understood.

You and governors have given a high priority to developing the skills of teachers. Since the previous inspection, you have appointed two senior leaders who have embraced their new responsibilities. Your commitment to 'every teacher a leader' ensures that teachers receive professional development to keep their skills and knowledge up to date. Staff are highly motivated; teachers told me that they feel empowered in their new roles. One member of staff commented, 'I have felt inspired by the school's achievements by pupils and staff alike. I am very proud to be a member of staff at Vange Primary School and Nursery School.' This was echoed by all staff who responded to the staff questionnaire.

An area for improvement in the previous inspection report was the quality of teaching in mathematics, by ensuring that teachers provide sufficient challenge to pupils by setting real-life problem-solving tasks. Pupils' work shows evidence of some conceptual understanding and fluency, but less evidence of opportunities for pupils to practise reasoning and problem-solving skills. As a result, too few pupils are reaching the higher level of achievement in mathematics. Leaders have firm actions in place to develop further teachers' skills in mathematics. This remains a priority for the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have successfully created a safe and caring environment in which pupils can learn. You have worked with pupils and parents to ensure that the term 'bullying' is recognised and understood by everyone and that it does not happen at the school. Your parent workshops have been well attended, supporting parents in understanding the school's behaviour systems and policies. This has had a huge effect, and there have been no recent incidents of poor behaviour.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are well kept. All statutory checks on employees are undertaken. 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.

Almost all pupils who responded to the online questionnaire said that they feel safe in school and that they have someone to speak to if they are worried. Pupils were able to explain how they keep safe online and know what to do if they have concerns.

Inspection findings

- In the 2016 phonics screening check, some pupils in Year 1 did not achieve in line with national expectations. Additionally, in key stage 1, pupils' attainment in reading was below national averages. Therefore, my first line of enquiry looked at the quality of teaching and learning of reading. Currently, pupils are making good progress in developing their understanding of phonics and using their knowledge to read unfamiliar words. The school's pupils' progress information also shows that pupils are well supported to catch up by the end of Year 2.
- Achievement in reading in key stage 2 and early years was slightly below the national expectation in 2016. However, small classes do not give a true reflection of achievement against national figures. There is evidence that pupils achieve broadly in line with national averages, and in some cases pupils make better than expected progress, especially in early years, where communication and language are a significant focus.
- The school has made reading a key focus, highlighted in its plan for improvement. The English leader was able to demonstrate the effect of her work to establish a 'love of reading', which is well under way. Pupils' perceptions of reading over time show an improved awareness of the purpose and enjoyment of reading. The library is a bright and cheery place, well stocked with books that inspire pupils to read. Year 6 pupils are drawn to the classics, such as 'Wuthering Heights', and a Year 1 pupil was excited to talk about the animals in his book, explaining to me the meaning of a 'pride of lions'.
- Teachers plan activities to deepen pupils' understanding of inference and comprehension skills in reading. In Years 3 and 4, pupils studied a picture of the front cover of a book and, through peer discussion, predicted what the story might be about. They used words in the title to explore synonyms and look for clues in the pictures. They were able to make connections between their prior knowledge and the new information to explain their thinking and give reasons for their predictions.
- Current progress suggests that pupils will reach the expected measure of achievement in reading at the end of 2017. However, you have already acknowledged that some pupils are not making as much progress as they should be to reach the higher levels of attainment in reading.
- Additionally, your monitoring and inspection evidence and the school's assessment information show that not enough pupils are reaching the higher level of achievement in mathematics and writing. Pupils' work shows that teachers are not always planning work well enough to challenge all pupils, particularly the most able, to make the progress that they are capable of.
- My second line of enquiry looked at the quality of teaching and learning in the early years. The reason for this was that a few children did not achieve the good level of development at the end of Reception in 2016. Children are happy and confident in the early years. Children benefit from a language-rich environment, and precisely planned activities enable some children to make accelerated progress in communication and language skills, and personal, social and

emotional aspects of learning. It is evident from the school's information and assessment processes that most children make good progress from their different starting points and, consequently, are ready for Year 1. On occasions, however, the most able children are not given opportunities to make as much progress as they should.

- The previous inspection report identified subject leadership as an area for development. This became my final line of enquiry. Due to staff changes, subject leaders are new in their roles and their work is yet to have an effect on pupils' outcomes. Subject leaders have clear action plans against areas for development, and there is evidence to suggest that subjects are well covered across all year groups. However, middle leaders' monitoring has identified that some teachers are not giving pupils enough opportunities to learn and apply skills in subjects such as geography, history and science. It also acknowledges that, although improving, teachers need to raise the level of challenge in mathematics and English, particularly for the most able pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers consistently expect a high standard of work and presentation from pupils
- teachers provide sufficient challenge to all pupils, particularly the most able, so that more pupils reach the higher levels of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics
- subject leaders provide more specific advice and help to teachers to ensure that pupils make good progress in all curriculum subjects, like geography, history and science.

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, senior leaders and two governors. I visited all the classrooms. Examples of children's work from this year and last 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 and safety and well-being.

A number of documents were reviewed, including the school's records of monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning, the single central record of employment checks, the school's self-evaluation, pupil assessment and progress information, and the school strategic plan. I took account of the 15 responses to the online Ofsted questionnaire completed by parents and 13 texts messages from parents. I also took into account 23 responses from staff who completed Ofsted's staff questionnaire and 34 pupils who completed the online pupil questionnaire.