

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



25 October 2017

Mr Brian Jones
Headteacher
Riverside Community Primary School
210 Poole Park Road
St Budeaux
Plymouth
Devon
PL5 1DD

Dear Mr Jones

Short inspection of Riverside Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 10 October 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 September 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

You, ably supported by your assistant headteachers, have been unwavering in your determination to secure the best possible learning experiences for pupils in the school. You have maintained a clear focus on pupils' learning and well-being even when faced with difficult and significant challenges for the school community.

Leaders, including governors, have a clear vision for the school. You meet the academic challenges facing the school through well-focused and effective curriculum development. Leaders reacted rapidly to a decline in standards in writing reflected most recently in the 2016 key stage 2 test results. School priorities, such as improving the teaching of spelling and handwriting, have had a positive impact. Consequently, pupils' writing skills are improving. Writing outcomes in 2017 demonstrate that Year 6 pupils made strong progress, with almost a fifth of pupils working at the higher standard. This year, pupils are further accelerating the progress they make in writing because you and your staff provide them with opportunities to use their writing skills in other subjects, such as history and geography.

Historically, fewer middle-attaining pupils have made accelerated progress in reading, writing and mathematics across key stage 1 to achieve the highest

standard. This trend is changing. Teaching assistants provide highly effective additional specialist support for middle-attaining pupils. The school's improved assessment procedures and teachers' high expectations have resulted in current pupils in Year 2 making rapid progress. This, combined with a strong coordinated drive for improvement from governors, has ensured that the school has recovered well after a dip in its performance.

Parents are extremely complimentary about the school and the education their children receive. They rightly recognise that the emotional well-being of pupils is at the heart of everything the school does. Positive parental relationships help to break down barriers to learning and raise expectations of pupils. The breakfast club provides a valuable resource for families and ensures that pupils start school ready to learn each day. Leaders are relentless in their drive to be at the 'heart of their local community' and are extremely proud of the community they serve. This pride is mutual and clear from the overwhelmingly positive responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, gathered as part of the inspection.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to provide more opportunities for pupils to set up and follow their own line of enquiry. You were also asked to deepen pupils' understanding of what they need to do to extend learning by more systematically developing their self-evaluation skills as they move through school. Your work in this regard is highly effective. A particular strength of the school is the way pupils are inspired to think deeply about their learning. Pupils develop resilience because of the way they are encouraged to approach problems.

Pupils are aware of their 'next steps' to improve and are enthusiastic about their learning. Teaching in science is particularly effective because pupils are given the opportunity to explore scientific concepts through experiments. They are taught how to use data from experiments in their explanations using self-directed writing, such as editing. For example, pupils in Year 6 have been investigating scientific concepts through independent enquiry. Pupils raised questions such as, 'Why does helium make balloons float?' They then used a wide range of research resources to find the answer and evaluate their own responses.

Leaders throughout the school, including governors, are working on the right aspects for improvement. However, further work is required so that leaders respond swiftly to tackle gaps in pupils' attendance, including the level of persistent absenteeism.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have created a safe culture in the school and engage well with parents, carers and other stakeholders to make sure that all pupils are supported and safe. Staff are knowledgeable about the most recent safeguarding procedures. They are clear about how to report concerns, and they know how to recognise signs of abuse or neglect.

Pupils know how to stay safe in and out of school, including online, because of the effective guidance they receive. Focused work on online safety ensures that pupils

are confident and able to explain what they would do if they were worried by something on screen. Pupils report that there is very little bullying of any sort in school, but that any disputes between pupils that arise are dealt with effectively by school staff. They say that such behaviour, which they know to be wrong, is not tolerated.

Inspection findings

- We agreed that my first line of enquiry would evaluate the impact of leaders' actions to improve standards in writing across key stage 2, especially at the higher standard. This was because the 2016 standards achieved in writing at the end of key stage 2 were lower than in reading and mathematics.
- Leaders identified that pupils' spelling and handwriting needed to be improved. Teachers now provide pupils with good models of spelling so that their expectations for pupils' work are clear and pupils know what makes a successful piece of writing. 'Pupil conferencing' is having a positive impact on standards in writing because of specialist, individual coaching from the class teacher. Teachers pay high regard to developing neat, joined handwriting across all curriculum areas, not just in English books. The school's assessment information now demonstrates that most pupils are making accelerated progress in writing in Years 5 and 6, with a significant proportion already working at the expected standard.
- You correctly identified that, historically, teachers' assessments of writing were not always accurate. Leaders and teachers have now improved their understanding of the revised expectations of the national tests through collaboration with local schools. Consequently, current assessments of pupils' writing reflect their true ability.
- My second line of enquiry was to find out how effective leaders' actions have been in improving outcomes in key stage 1. This was because published assessment information in 2016 indicated that attainment was low for the children who had left the early years working at the expected standard.
- There was a dip in the proportion of pupils meeting the expected level in the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2017. However, inspection evidence confirms leaders' assessments that currently over 80% of pupils in Year 1 are working at the expected standard. This is evident in their reading and writing. Achievement information recorded for key stage 1 in 2017 is accurate, with three quarters of all Year 2 pupils reaching the expected standard in reading and almost a fifth reading at the higher standard.
- Leaders' monitoring confirms that teaching over time is consistently strong in Year 1 and Year 2. Evidence in pupils' books and assessment records shows that pupils of all abilities often make rapid progress in English and mathematics. Reading is promoted effectively with most-able readers having access to a wide range of challenging texts from the well-stocked library. Pupils also apply their English and mathematics skills well in other subjects, including history, religious education and art.

- My third line of enquiry checked how effectively leaders ensure that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported to succeed. This was because published assessment information for these pupils was low in both key stage 1 and key stage 2.
- Teaching assistants are a valuable asset to the school and are well deployed to support pupils' learning. This support is particularly effective for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Consequently, pupils' work in books demonstrates that they make good progress from their unique starting points. However, leaders have correctly identified that the systems used to monitor pupils' progress do not accurately reflect the real extent of their achievement.
- Pastoral leadership of special educational needs is strong. The special educational needs coordinator has made sensibly focused, necessary changes to provision. She has ensured that additional funding is spent more effectively. In particular, she has ensured that teachers are better trained to meet the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Consequently, pupils' needs are well catered for and they are provided with a range of opportunities and resources to support their learning.
- My final line of enquiry focused on the impact of leaders' systems to ensure that pupils' attendance is improved. I explored why the most recently published attendance figures indicated that attendance and persistent absence were weaknesses.
- Scrutiny of case studies confirmed that the high rate of persistent absence was due to the large number of families taking unauthorised holiday in term time. Leaders rigorously challenge this. You work hard, in partnership with the parent support adviser, to instil the importance of good attendance with parents and carers. You use a range of initiatives to motivate pupils to attend school regularly. The pupils I spoke with are inspired by the rewards system and talked about how proud they are when they receive the 'attendance teddy'. However, the impact of these actions on improving attendance is not yet evident in current attendance information.
- Leaders do not effectively analyse patterns of attendance for groups of pupils and therefore any dips in attendance are not quickly followed up. Consequently, the school's absence rates remain higher than national comparisons for most groups of pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- leaders refine their monitoring systems to enable them to rapidly identify, and address, gaps in the attendance of groups
- the precision of assessments for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities improves, particularly with respect to closely monitoring their small steps in learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Costello
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and we talked about the improvements that had been made since the previous inspection. I also considered your self-evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I looked at safeguarding records, including parental complaints and behaviour records. Together, we explored your recruitment and vetting procedures. I held a discussion with middle leaders including the special educational needs coordinator. I met with two governors, including the chair of the governing body. We carried out a learning walk in the school. Together, we looked at a sample of books from all year groups. I had a discussion with a group of pupils to gather their views of the school and their learning. I listened to a group of Year 1 pupils read during their phonics session. I also considered the 21 responses submitted by parents through Parent View.