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Mr Chris Ashman
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Dear Mr Ashman

Short inspection of Rackheath Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 14 November 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 June 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

You became headteacher after the previous inspection, following a period of temporary leadership for the school. You have established a strong and effective team who work well together and who are determined to do their best for every pupil. You and your staff demonstrate the school's motto, 'Inspiring learning, valuing all', on a daily basis. Capturing pupils' imagination is key to your approach. For example, as part of your science focus, you have a table in the entrance where pupils can come to observe stick insects. During the inspection, a number of pupils came at breaktimes, determined to spot the creatures hiding amid the foliage in the tanks.

You have successfully addressed the issues from the previous inspection. Attainment at key stage 1 has improved and, at the end of Year 2, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics is now above national averages. You have also successfully improved achievement in writing so that it is closer to that of reading.

Pupils get off to a good start in school, quickly settling into the school's routines and expectations. During the inspection, pupils in the Reception class were already able to listen for extended periods of time and answer questions appropriately using

extended sentences. Pupils make good progress throughout their time at school. Under your highly effective leadership, standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6 have continued to exceed national averages. This is because you and your team are ambitious and very reflective. You identify where further improvements are needed and put in place sensible plans to address these. For example, you recognised that some pupils' spelling skills are not as good as they should be and have made changes to the way spelling is taught right from the Reception Year. You also draw on expertise beyond the school, for example visiting two outstanding schools in another part of the country to see best practice which can be utilised in your school.

Staff welcome the support you provide and every member of staff who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire said that they are proud to be part of Rackheath Primary School. You provide high-quality professional development, looking for different ways to do this to support your staff and make them feel valued. For example, staff carried out 'lesson studies' by working together and observing each other's teaching and providing feedback to each other. As a result, teaching is good across the school. Pupils told me that teachers are always helpful and supportive, 'but always challenge you to the very limit'.

Pupils behave extremely well and enjoy working and playing together. This is because adults in school establish positive relationships with pupils. They teach pupils about respect and model this in how they treat pupils and each other. Pupils said that there are very few incidents of poor behaviour in school and that bullying is extremely rare. One pupil told me, 'Everyone is friendly at this school, and everyone is welcome'. This view was readily confirmed by others I spoke to.

Governors are highly committed to the school. They know the school well because they visit regularly, ask questions of leaders and challenge leaders when needed. For example, governors spoke about their approach to setting pupil targets and how they ensure that these are achievable but always aspirational. Governors think carefully about the school currently and plan carefully for the future. For example, they have considered how to promote the school more widely in order to ensure that pupil numbers continue to grow as they have done over the past four years. They have a very clear succession plan in place to ensure that, when some members of the governing body step down, there are always others who are skilled and knowledgeable to take over.

Parents are highly supportive of the school and every parent who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, said that they would recommend the school to another parent. One comment typifies the views of many: 'Words cannot express the gratitude that we feel about the staff who make this school such a brilliant place for our daughter to enjoy her primary education. It is a happy, welcoming, caring place to be.' This high level of praise for the school is a result of the many strategies that you and your team have put in place to increase parental partnership. These include drop-in sessions to look at pupils' work, opportunities for parents to share lunch with pupils and 'stay and play' sessions for parents of children in the early years. It is also because parents recognise the high level of

commitment shown by all staff, for example, by returning on a Friday evening for the 'book at bedtime' session in school. You maintain excellent communication with parents by being highly visible around the school on a daily basis. This is reflected in comments such as 'Chris Ashman has made an important impact on the school; he is nearly always present at the school gates morning and evening to offer a cheery hello and goodbye to children and parents, and to attend to any issues or concerns.'

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that the school has highly effective arrangements for keeping children safe in school. You make sure that your staff are well trained and knowledgeable about the risks to pupils. This is effective as shown in the concerns forms completed by staff. Checks on staff are thorough and meet statutory requirements. You keep careful records of all concerns and meet with the other designated professionals to review all concerns on a regular basis. As a result, nothing is missed which may put a pupil at risk of harm. You are tenacious in following up concerns with external agencies when necessary and ensure that appropriate action is taken to support pupils and their families. You have established excellent relationships with parents, who trust you and your team and welcome the support you provide for them in difficult circumstances.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and parents agree with them. Pupils said that there is always someone to talk to if they have concerns and adults always listen to them. You are conscious of the potential dangers pupils face when online and regularly teach pupils about these risks. Pupils were confident in telling me what they should and should not do online. You have also worked with parents to raise their awareness of online safety issues so that they are well informed about how they can protect their children at home.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed the lines of enquiry that I would follow up to test if the school remains good. The first area that I looked at was whether the achievement of boys and girls was equally good in reading and writing.
- Closing the attainment gap between boys and girls was an area for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. In addition, I had identified that, in 2017, in Year 6, the progress made by boys in reading and writing was lower than that made by girls.
- I visited all classes and found that boys and girls are equally engaged in their learning. Pupils I spoke to, both boys and girls, said that they enjoyed their lessons, including English lessons, and that teachers made their learning enjoyable through the contexts they selected. I saw this at first hand in the Year 1 class where pupils were reciting a poem that they were learning. In this class, boys and girls were very enthusiastically joining in and keen to talk about the poem.
- I looked at pupils' work in classes and found that the majority of boys and girls are making equally good progress in their writing. However, occasionally, some

younger boys are not encouraged to write at length to develop their writing stamina when they are capable of doing so.

- I looked at the school's assessment information and discussed the 2017 Year 6 outcomes. The school's data confirms that the achievement of boys and girls in reading and writing is broadly similar in each year group, and that last year's results do not represent a trend.
- The second area I looked at during the inspection was whether pupils make equally good progress in subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics. I found that pupils enjoy a very broad and interesting curriculum. You have sought out opportunities to widen pupils' experiences. For example, pupils have opportunities to take music lessons and to participate in a wide range of sporting activities in school and through competitions with local schools. Pupils told me how much they enjoy their art lessons and learning about other countries.
- I saw at first hand the work pupils are doing as part of your science focus this half term. Pupils spoke knowledgeably about aspects of science that they had learned, such as air and water resistance, and told me how much they were looking forward to the 'James Bond egg challenge' to explore this practically.
- You and your team plan trips and events which also enhance pupils' learning. For example, Year 6 had just returned from a residential week. The class teacher was using this as a stimulus for report writing, drawing on pupils' enjoyment of the week.
- You acknowledge that systems for checking the progress that pupils are making in subjects other than English and mathematics are just being developed. You have made a good start in science and are wisely evaluating how this works in practice before implementing it more widely.
- In some subjects, such as geography, middle leaders do not regularly check the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects. As a consequence, some subject leaders are not yet able to identify where pupils are making strong progress in their subjects and where more needs to be done.
- The third line of enquiry that I investigated was whether disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make good progress. This was because the number of these pupils in published data is small and I wanted to make sure that the most vulnerable pupils in your school were achieving as well as others.
- I discussed the progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Leaders were able to demonstrate that these pupils make good progress because the support provided for them is well planned and delivered. Training is provided for staff to ensure that they understand pupils' needs, and support staff work together to share their skills and develop their practice.
- Support provided for disadvantaged pupils is also generally appropriate and well thought out. For example, the pastoral support worker was, until her recent departure, used effectively to support pupils in their social and emotional development. As a result, in the past, most disadvantaged pupils made good progress by the end of Year 6. However, as you explained, the school has a greater number of disadvantaged pupils who have more complex needs than was

the case in the past. Some disadvantaged pupils currently in the school are not achieving as well as they should. Plans for the use of pupil premium funding are not as sharply focused as they should be to accelerate the progress of those pupils who fall behind.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- middle leaders develop further the systems for checking the quality of teaching and learning and the progress pupils are making in their subjects, so that they can plan for further improvements
- provision for disadvantaged pupils is more finely tuned towards individual pupils' needs, so that more pupils make accelerated progress and achieve expected standards in each year group.

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

Yours sincerely

Maria Curry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, your leader for SEN and three governors. I met with a group of pupils from Years 4, 5 and 6. I scrutinised a range of documents, including information on pupils' progress, safeguarding, development planning and the school's self-evaluation. I visited all classes and evaluated pupils' work. I checked the school's website and found it to meet requirements on the publication of specified information.