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Mrs Ann Grisley
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Grisley

Short inspection of Limes Farm Infant School and Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 28 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Following a term as acting headteacher, you were appointed headteacher in April 2017 and have continued to build on the good practice recognised at the previous inspection.

At Limes Farm, children and pupils enter the school eager and happy to start work. Those who I spoke with told me that they enjoyed school and 'loved everything'. Parents are overwhelmingly complimentary about you, your team and the school. One parent commented, 'Teachers are friendly and welcoming as are the other children. I absolutely love sending my children to this school.' There is a strong community spirit within the school. All staff responding to the staff questionnaire who said that they were proud to be a member of the school confirm this.

In lessons, pupils demonstrate good attitudes to learning and engage fully in lesson activities. At playtimes, they play well together and move around the school building calmly. Your 'language and playtime ambassadors' told me how they help children new to the school settle in by teaching them new words in English and befriending them at playtime. Parents who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire, Parent View, confirm that their children are happy and safe at school. One parent told me that her daughter 'wants to come to school on a Saturday and Sunday'.

Parents speak highly of leaders and the school staff. They are confident that their children leave infant school ready for the next stage in their education. One parent

commented, 'I have been impressed with the new headteacher and deputy headteacher combination, a good mix of firm and fair! I will be sad when my son leaves for Year 3 next September, but I'm confident he has been given a good foundation on which to build on.' Parents appreciate the open doors at the start of the day when they have opportunities to speak with teachers and support staff about their children's learning. 'Look together' is extremely popular with parents, when once a week children share their work with their parents. One parent commented, 'It gives me confidence that my child is taught well and I don't need to wait till parents' evening to see my child's progress at school.'

You and your leaders have addressed the recommendations from the previous inspection report and improved the quality of teaching and learning of writing across the school. Pupils' work shows that they have regular opportunities to write at length and apply their writing skills across a range of topics. Pupils are given time in lessons to review, edit and improve their work. Teachers provide appropriate comments to pupils about their work to help them make good progress. Consequently, pupils' writing books show progress over time and achievement information confirms that outcomes for pupils in writing are improving.

Since the previous inspection, and since taking on the role of substantive headteacher, you have further developed and improved systems for tracking and assessing the progress children and pupils make. This has enabled you to accurately record assessment information and identify gaps in teaching and learning for all groups of pupils. This has been fundamental in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school and consequently, improving pupils' outcomes. Published end of year attainment results for Reception children and Year 2 pupils show an improving picture year-on-year.

During my visit, you and your leaders were able to demonstrate that all pupil groups make good and better progress from their different starting points. This is particularly the case for pupils who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This was confirmed in the quality of pupils' work in both writing and mathematics, and the enthusiasm with which pupils confidently approach and engage in a range of activities during lessons.

End of year published results show that the vast majority of pupils attain in line with national expectations at expected and higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2. However, you and your leaders recognise that developing teachers' use of assessment information further will move pupils' learning on quicker so that a greater proportion of pupils make more progress. Consequently, more pupils will exceed the expected standards and reach the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You ensure that the necessary checks are made on all staff prior to them taking up their appointments. Governors regularly monitor and evaluate the school's

single central record and complete a dated list with suggestions for improvement. All staff know children and pupils well. The school community is a nurturing environment where vulnerable pupils are well cared for. Processes for following up pupil concerns are efficient and staff are swift at following up actions with outside agencies to ensure that pupils are safe and looked after at Limes Farm.

Pupils behave well and are polite to each other and adults. All parents who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, said that the school dealt effectively with bullying. Pupils I spoke with told me that bullying did not happen at school. All pupils who I met, and those who completed the Ofsted pupil questionnaire, said they could talk to someone if something was worrying them. Parents and staff agree that pupils are safe at the school. Pupils are taught how to stay safe when using the internet. They were able to describe and explain lessons on internet safety and know they should tell an adult if someone they did not know tried to contact them while online.

Inspection findings

- In order for me to ascertain whether the school remained good, my first line of enquiry was concerned with the progress that pupils make in phonics. The reason for this was that the proportion of pupils who met the required standard in the phonics screening check in Year 1 has been below the national expectation for the last three years.
- When observing phonics teaching across the school, it was evident that there is a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics. Pupils are able to use their prior learning to help them to read and write new words. In all lessons observed, pupils revisited previous learning and were introduced to new sounds. Pupils have opportunities to apply the newly learned sounds in reading and writing. Classrooms are 'language rich' and prompts are readily available to support and remind pupils of key sounds and tricky words.
- Teachers assess the learning of pupils throughout the lesson and highly skilled teaching assistants support small groups of most-able pupils to start sooner on an activity, while other adults provide effective support for those who need to catch up. For example, in Year 2, I observed a guided reading session where pupils were engaged in a variety of tailored activities to develop their reading skills.
- Pupils read to me with confidence and fluency, taking note of punctuation and using their knowledge of sounds to read unfamiliar words. Another group were developing their comprehension skills by learning to answer questions by retrieving information from a text about Mount Everest.
- The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in phonics is improving year-on-year. In 2017, results have improved further so the proportion of pupils meeting the standard in the phonics check is now broadly in line with national expectations. As almost half of this cohort of pupils entered Reception in 2015 with English as an additional language, which prevented them from achieving a good level of development in 2016, this represents good progress. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning in phonics is effective, with children and

pupils making good and better progress from their different starting points.

- My second line of enquiry was about how leaders ensure that children in the early years make the progress of which they are capable. This was because the proportion of children reaching a good level of development at the end of Reception has been consistently below national standards for the last five years.
- Raising achievement in the early years has been a school priority. Evidence confirms that a high proportion of children enter Nursery and Reception with very low starting points in most aspects of communication and language.
- The school's improved assessment and tracking systems enable early identification of children's needs. Leaders and teachers are able to identify gaps in all areas of learning, particularly in areas which can prevent children from achieving a good level of development such as communication and language and personal, social and emotional aspects. These can be barriers to children's learning. Teachers use this information to plan tasks which support children to catch up. You and your leaders work very effectively with speech and language specialists to provide precise support, which addresses children's individual speech and language needs.
- Teachers and teaching assistants have undergone appropriate training to deliver small group catch-up programmes, which are having a positive impact on the progress children are making, particularly in speech and language. Parents are far more aware of how to support their children at home due to the success you have had with parent workshops and information evenings.
- As a result, attainment has improved significantly year-on-year, with children making good and, in most cases, accelerated progress from their different starting points in reading, writing and number. However, you recognise that by developing teachers' practice in the early years in the use of the school's assessment and tracking systems, even more children can be supported to make good and better progress. This will enable more children to reach a good level of development by the end of Reception.
- Pupils' attendance was a concern in 2016, particularly for pupils who are disadvantaged and, therefore, this was my final line of enquiry. You have taken measures to raise the profile of attendance and work closely with the home school worker to ensure that there is support in place for those families who need it.
- Attendance has fluctuated with pupil absence from sickness for a high proportion of pupils this year. The introduction of individual and whole-class attendance rewards and information you provide for parents about attendance are yet to have a significant impact. Attendance remains just below national figures and continues to be a priority for leaders.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers use assessment information to plan activities precisely so that more pupils reach the expected standards and more pupils are given opportunities to

reach the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics

- teachers and additional adults in the early years continue to develop their practice so that they use assessment information precisely to ensure that a higher proportion of children reach a good level of development year-on-year
- leaders continue to raise the profile of attendance so that attendance is at least in line with national averages and persistent absences are greatly reduced.

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, the senior leader and governors.
- I spoke with a representative from the local authority and I spoke with parents at the start of the day.
- I visited all year groups and looked at examples of children's work.
- I observed children's behaviour during lessons and as they moved around the school.
- I spoke to children in and around the school and listened to pupils read.
- I reviewed a number of documents, including the single central record of employment checks, the school's self-evaluation, pupil assessment and progress information, the school's improvement plan and minutes of the governing body meetings.
- I also took account of the 17 responses to the online Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, and 14 text messages from parents. Additionally, I considered the results provided by 25 members of staff in the school's staff questionnaire and six pupils who responded to the pupil questionnaire.