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Miss Sarah Vass
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Dear Miss Vass

Short inspection of Great Totham Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 30 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 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. You have successfully created a shared commitment to provide an inclusive school in which pupils are valued and ready for the next steps of their education. An overwhelming majority of parents and pupils who responded to the online surveys would recommend the school. The comment that the school is 'providing a safe and secure environment for my children to learn and grow in' was typical of the sentiments expressed by many parents.

You are skilfully establishing a dedicated team of staff who possess the strategies and knowledge to ensure that pupils make at least good social and academic progress. All staff who responded to the online survey agree they enjoy and are proud to be working at the school. You correctly recognise the importance of developing strong middle and senior leadership in your large primary school.

Senior and subject leadership teams are having a significant impact on building upon the good-quality education that already exists. For example, when key stage 1 pupils' progress in reading dipped in 2016, leaders altered the school's approach to the teaching of phonics and reading from the early years upwards. As a result of improved teaching, in 2017 pupils' achievement in phonics was above national expectations and their achievement in reading improved by the end of key stage 1.

Further evidence of leaders' effective work can also be seen in the impact on the

areas identified as ones for improvement at the time of the previous inspection. For example, leaders focused upon improving the quality of pupils' writing across the curriculum. In this, leaders have been successful and pupils write increasingly well and their achievement has improved sharply as a result.

Governors provide clear strategic leadership and share your ambition to provide the highest quality education for pupils of all ages at the school. They assure themselves of the quality of provision through visits and detailed discussions with staff, such as when they recently checked the quality of the early years provision. A distinctive feature of leaders', including governors', work is the candour with which they reflect upon what is working and what is not. They keep each aspect of provision under careful scrutiny and make changes in a timely and effective way. For example, governors recently analysed the strengths and weaknesses of their own work. As a consequence, they are further improving the precision with which they question leaders about the progress pupils make across the curriculum.

At the time of the previous inspection, pupils' behaviour was judged to be outstanding. Pupils, including children in the early years, continue to behave exceptionally well. They knowingly reflect the school's values of enjoy, respect and achieve. Pupils explained to me how they 'see respect all around the school', and that it is important to 'just keep trying and don't give up' in their learning. Pupils respond extremely well to the high standards modelled by adults. In lessons, pupils are eager to learn, supportive of each other and determined to succeed. At breaktimes and lunchtimes, they mix easily and well, making suitably enthusiastic use of the wide range of facilities available to them.

As a consequence of your high profile 'Learner@Totham' campaign, pupils value and develop the resilience to become successful in their learning. They told me how they 'Get stuck in to learning and strive for my best'. Pupils confidently attempt more difficult tasks that teachers plan for them, through the school's colour-coded challenges. These challenges enable pupils to make their own choices and deepen their learning experiences. Pupils also present their work neatly and well, not only in English and mathematics, but also in other subjects across the curriculum. Pupils told me how much they value the work of teachers, teaching assistants and adult helpers in providing assistance when it is needed.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, ensure that the school meets its statutory duty to keep children safe. Each of the 127 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, consider their children to be safe at Great Totham Primary School. Pupils also explained that they feel safe and well cared for. Their ease of manner and confidence in offering their opinions reflect their sense of security. There is a palpable sense of mutual respect and trust at the school.

As a result of regular training, staff understand and are alert to their responsibilities with regards to safeguarding pupils. Adults know the signs that indicate a pupil may be vulnerable or at risk. They report concerns appropriately. Inspection evidence

indicates that staff clearly understand and consistently follow policies and processes, such as using the school's specific reporting forms. Leaders keep well-organised school records. These confirm the timely action taken to ensure that pupils receive appropriate support when needed.

Pupils have an age-appropriate knowledge of what bullying is and what it is not. Importantly, they can clearly distinguish between 'falling out' and bullying. Pupils recognise the importance of quickly resolving any friendship issues that may occur. They understand the upset that bullying can cause and told me it was a rare occurrence at their school. Pupils express clear confidence that adults would deal with any incidents of bullying well.

Inspection findings

- My initial line of enquiry was to establish the progress pupils are making in mathematics. This is because, in 2017, pupils' achievement in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 fell and was lower than in reading and writing.
- Leaders have carefully examined the reasons why pupils have previously not achieved as well in mathematics as they should have. Using this information, leaders have taken decisive action to improve the consistency and confidence with which mathematics is taught.
- As a result of appropriate training and clear direction from numeracy leaders, teachers are more skilled at planning and implementing mathematics learning activities. For example, teachers make good use of their training in developing pupils' problem-solving and questioning skills. Consequently, pupils make good progress in mathematics.
- The well-designed mathematics curriculum includes logically sequenced programmes of learning which contain a wide range of activities. This has ignited pupils' enthusiasm for the subject. Pupils told me how much they enjoy learning in their mathematics lessons. Comments such as 'I like the challenges' and 'I enjoy seeking patterns in numbers' were typical of views expressed.
- As outlined in the school's approach to teaching mathematics, teachers regularly revisit key mathematical concepts to ensure that pupils have a secure grasp of each one. Evidence from pupils' books demonstrates they are putting their knowledge of these concepts to good use as they attempt progressively more complex mathematical problems.
- Teachers provide pupils with frequent and regular opportunities to practise these skills and pupils respond enthusiastically and well. For example, pupils in Year 6 worked extremely well together, using their knowledge of factors and equivalency to develop puzzles for their classmates to solve.
- Leaders' accurate evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment demonstrates there is work to be done to ensure that all teachers replicate the strong practice seen in many classes. For example, in a small number of classes, teachers do not consistently provide opportunities for pupils to achieve the higher standards of which they are capable.

- My second key line of enquiry was to establish how well more vulnerable pupils are supported to make good progress. This was because these pupils made less progress than other pupils in 2017.
- Several parents commented positively about the level of 'nurture and care' provided for pupils who need extra support. Inspection evidence supports their views. This high level of care begins when children start in the early years and is maintained throughout the school.
- The provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is led well. Leaders ensure that pupils' needs are identified quickly and appropriate support is put in place. For example, adults in the early years are quick to identify children who may need help to develop their communication skills. Children then receive precise support that enables them to progress quickly.
- Pupils who need additional or amended provision receive it in a variety of ways, including through the school's 'starbuilders' curriculum. Leaders track pupils' academic and social progress closely and adjust the support they receive accordingly.
- Several pupils told me how much they appreciate the work of teaching assistants in helping them to develop confidence in their learning. Pupils are encouraged and challenged to work independently, through the skilful help and cajoling of teachers and teaching assistants. A scrutiny of pupils' work provided evidence of their willingness to attempt increasingly challenging activities, often ending up independent of adults' assistance.
- Leaders have a good understanding of the potential barriers to learning that disadvantaged pupils face. Using this information well, leaders put in place precise and effective support for pupils. As a result, disadvantaged pupils make good progress in line with that of their peers.
- My third line of enquiry was to establish how effectively leaders are ensuring that pupils attend well. This was because, in a school where pupil attendance is high, a small group of pupils did not attend as well as their peers in 2016.
- Leaders place a high priority on pupils attending well. Attendance remains good and pupils rarely miss a day. Through careful monitoring, leaders are quick to act when a pupil's attendance starts to slip. Where a pupil or their family needs it, the school's family support worker provides effective help and guidance. The attendance of pupils in receipt of this help improves and is often good.
- A line of enquiry that emerged on the day of the inspection was to explore the progress pupils make across the curriculum. We agreed this so I could establish the breadth of skills and knowledge pupils were developing.
- Subject leaders work well together and have designed a curriculum that fires pupils' imagination and their enthusiasm for learning. Pupils of all ages were eager to tell me how much they enjoyed learning across a wide range of subjects, including art, physical education and music. They explained how topics such as 'The Vikings' and 'Dragon Eggs' enabled them to use 'things I learn in English, art and history to discover more'.

- Teachers typically have the same high expectations for pupils' work across the curriculum as exist in English and mathematics. As part of leaders' concerted approach to improve pupils' writing, teachers ensure that learning activities provide opportunities to practise and develop their literacy skills. Pupils respond well and produce well-planned and reflective writing, particularly in history and religious education.
- Evidence in pupils' work, including that in the attractive displays around the school, demonstrates the good progress they often make across the curriculum. For example, in science, upper key stage 2 pupils are given scope to carry out their own investigations on topics such as resistance and acceleration. They do so well and apply their literacy and numeracy skills effectively in their evaluation of what they have learned.
- Leaders of subjects such as history, science and art do not yet have a precise overview of the progress pupils make in these subjects. The headteacher has plans in place to rectify this situation.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- plans to make sure foundation subject leadership teams track pupils' progress with the precision evident in English and mathematics are quickly implemented
- all teachers replicate the strongest practice in school and make sure that more pupils achieve the higher standards.

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

John Lucas
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- I held discussions with you about the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, leaders' evaluation of the quality of education, plans for future improvement and information about current pupils' learning.
- I also met with other senior leaders, subject leaders and the chair of governors together with two other governors. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.
- Documents such as the school's improvement plans, leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, pupil premium reports, and the school's safeguarding arrangements, records, files and documentation were

examined.

- Together with you and your deputy headteacher, I observed pupils learning in each year group. We looked at examples of children's and pupils' work to explore the progress they are making over time.
- I spoke with a group of 15 pupils and also with others informally during lessons and breaktime regarding their learning. I also considered the views of 114 pupils who responded to the online survey.
- I considered the views of parents I spoke with at the start of the school day as well as those 127 parents who responded to Parent View. The views of 11 staff who completed Ofsted's staff questionnaire were also taken into account.