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17 January 2018

Mr Terry Flitman
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Flitman

Short inspection of Wickford Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 13 December 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 and your leadership team provide clear direction and parents and staff alike recognise the high quality of leadership in your school. There is a consistent approach to teaching and learning which leads to pupils making good progress as they move through the school. Leaders and governors are excited about the merger with The Wickford Infant School to form a primary school in September 2018. They have a clear vision of how this will benefit the current pupils of Wickford Junior School through wider subject choices.

The previous Ofsted inspection identified many strengths which you have built upon. You continue to ensure that a topic-based curriculum together with a range of high-quality enrichment experiences keep your pupils interested and motivated. For example, pupils studying the history of World War II also designed and built Anderson shelters and tested their resistance using a range of materials. Pupils talked about singing Greek songs, and cooking a Greek meal at home, during a topic on Ancient Greece.

Pupils and their parents expressed their appreciation of the willingness of staff to give extra time to enrich and extend learning. Pupils spoke of the enjoyment they get from attending a range of clubs, including sports, dance, drama, choir and gardening. Pupils are offered many interesting learning experiences, for

example working with the National Portrait Gallery and taking part in a residential outdoor pursuits week. Pupils have opportunities to take on responsibilities, and spoke, for example, about performing duties as school councillors, form monitors, sports leaders and running their own tuck shop.

Wickford Junior School is a warm and welcoming school. Pupils are confident and articulate and these skills are developed through discussion and debate. Pupils present their work with pride and display strong attitudes towards learning, their school and each other. Personal development, behaviour and welfare continue to be particular strengths of the school. You ensure that effective care and support is offered to vulnerable pupils. Pupils talked about the good support and advice they receive about staying healthy, including how to maintain good mental health. Parents spoke very highly of the support offered to pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

You recognise that there are still areas in which the school needs to improve. For example, you have firm plans to continue to improve pupils' achievements in reading. You also acknowledge that you require more precision in the ways in which assessment is used to track and support pupils' progress in all areas of the curriculum.

Safeguarding is effective.

All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You ensure that all necessary checks are made on staff prior to taking up appointments. Records are complete, up to date and regularly checked. Staff and governors undertake regular and relevant training. You take all aspects of health and safety very seriously and there is good provision for pupils who have medical needs. Parents commended this. You hold regular meetings to share any concerns regarding pupils and this ensures that nothing is overlooked. Although rare, when there has been the need, staff have worked closely with other professionals, such as health and family support, to make sure that pupils are safe and well supported. The work of the learning mentor is invaluable in engaging in early support and the school has its own counsellor.

Pupils report feeling safe at school. Pupils engage in a range of activities to ensure that bullying is prevented and are proud to be anti-bullying ambassadors. As a result, bullying and discrimination are rare and pupils trust adults to resolve any concerns that they may have. Pupils have a good awareness of when they may be at risk in a range of situations, including when using the internet, and how to manage these effectively. Parents are confident that their children are well looked after.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain whether the school remains good, my first line of enquiry was about the actions that leaders have taken since the previous inspection to improve reading. Although pupils leave Year 6 with standards a little above

pupils nationally, they do not make as much progress from their starting points as pupils nationally. However, analysis of the school's current assessment information showed that all pupils currently make good progress in reading throughout the school. However, pupils do not make consistently rapid progress in reading.

- The school has worked hard to ensure that its reading assessments are accurate by checking these regularly against local partner schools and external assessors from the local authority and elsewhere. Teachers use regular assessments to identify pupils who require additional support such as small group teaching or one-to-one tuition. Governors have provided resources for an additional teacher to allow this to take place. However, pupils' strengths and areas of weakness are not consistently identified and tracked through the assessments conducted. As a result, pupils do not make rapid progress in reading.
- Leaders have introduced a new approach to teaching reading which is well matched to the needs of different levels of ability. Pupils develop specific reading skills throughout the curriculum. As a result, pupils are able to talk about these skills and employ strategies to make sense of what they read in different subject areas. The school has aligned quality reading books to topics, so that pupils have frequent exposure to challenging texts. Pupils' work shows that the strategies taught in English are being applied consistently across other subjects.
- My second key line of enquiry was about teachers providing more challenge for the most able pupils. This was an area for improvement in the previous inspection report. Leaders have worked hard to address this.
- School assessment information shows that the most able pupils make good progress in all year groups. Most pupils who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire said that they are almost always challenged in their learning. The school curriculum is broad and enriched with cross-curricular topic work, enabling the most able pupils to explore subjects in greater depth. In addition, the most able pupils have ample opportunity to develop critical skills, knowledge and understanding through challenging homework tasks.
- The school offers a wide range of extended opportunities to develop the most able pupils' skills in a range of areas. For example, some pupils attend secondary school classes and work with a local university.
- Inspection evidence demonstrated that tasks and questions in lessons and books were well matched to the different needs of pupils. Teaching assistants support the most able pupils effectively with additional challenge and extension tasks.
- Lastly, I looked at how leaders use the assessment information from the pupils' infant school to inform teaching, learning and assessment at the junior school. Leaders are aware of the importance of sharing a common understanding of pupils' progress in both key stages 1 and 2 and have worked closely with the infant school. Recently, governors have decided that closer alignment of teaching methods, continuity of curriculum and agreed

assessment is critical to improving pupils' outcomes at the end of their primary education. Therefore, the governors have taken a strategic decision to effectively merge the two schools.

- Staff and governors from both schools are now working together to ensure that this change is successful. However, you rightly identify that assessment information is not consistently used effectively to monitor, track and support pupils across the curriculum.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' achievements in reading continue to improve across the key stage
- staff across both key stages and year groups use assessment information accurately and effectively to support pupils' rapid progress in every area of the curriculum.

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

Susan Sutton
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During the inspection, I met with you, senior and middle leaders, parents, governors and pupils.
- I visited all the classrooms and looked at children's work. I listened to pupils read and I observed behaviour around the school.
- A number of documents were reviewed, including improvement planning, the single central record of employment checks, child protection systems, the school's self-evaluation, pupil assessment and progress information, attendance information and the school improvement plan.