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Nicholas Taylor
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Dear Mr Taylor

Short inspection of Writtle Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 25 January 2018, 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 October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Parents and carers speak highly of your leadership and how it has enabled you to establish a very warm and positive atmosphere. They recognise that your passion for education inspires pupils and staff. As one parent commented: 'There is a genuine respect for Mr Taylor. He has the unique skill of being able to relate to children but also command respect and authority.' Pupils have a strong sense of belonging and being a central part of the school. They feel included in its work but are equally aware of the need to be inclusive themselves. A Year 6 pupil, for example, said that he felt it was not good enough to treat others as you would like to be treated but that we should 'treat others as they would like to be treated' because they are different from us. The sophistication of understanding shown here is down to you and the importance you place on aspects of the curriculum such as spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Under your leadership the curriculum is developing rapidly into a creative, rich and exciting framework for pupils' learning. They are engaged and stimulated by the work they are doing. The use of technology is particularly strong in the school and teachers and pupils use it routinely to support learning across the curriculum. The work that you have done with pupils on developing designs for a life-size, functional pod, which they will now construct, has captured their imagination. It has provided rich learning opportunities such as working with planners and architects to design

the pod. You and your deputy headteacher agreed that the development of written work to help pupils deepen their thinking further has not caught up with the work that pupils are doing across the curriculum through practical activities and discussion.

Since the previous inspection, you and your leadership team have focused relentlessly on raising standards and this has enabled the school to make significant strides forward. Staff work as a team. Hence, there is a consistent approach to teaching and learning. For example, teachers in all classes routinely assess pupils' prior learning when they begin a new topic to identify what they know already and identify gaps or weaker areas of learning. They adapt work so that it is focused on closing any gaps and ensuring secure understanding. Pupils are very keen learners and gain immense enjoyment from their learning because work is well tailored to their needs. When pupils talk about their work, they do so articulately and with good understanding of how well they are progressing, and what they need to do to improve.

Your success as a leader is supported by your openness to new ideas and an enquiring approach which enables you to seek out best practice from elsewhere and adapt it so that it makes a difference to pupils at the school. Staff are proud to work at the school and enjoy being there. You have also responded positively to requests from the local authority to support other schools in the local authority area.

Governors support the school's work well and challenge and question leaders skilfully. They work well in partnership with you and know the current priorities and what you and your staff are working on in order to further improve standards. This reflects the school's own accurate and incisive understanding of how good it is. While there is more work to do to improve the standards of pupils' writing by the end of key stage 2, standards of work have risen and pupils across the school are achieving well. Pupils' achievements and the progress they make in mathematics are a particular strength.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils are adamant that the school cares for them and looks after them very effectively. Hence, they feel safe. Their parents also agree that the school keeps pupils safe.

Effective training for all staff and governors and well-developed procedures ensure that any concerns or issues of safety or welfare are picked up quickly and resolved. Records are well maintained, enabling effective tracking of actions to address concerns, including follow-up with external agencies such as social services. The school carries out thorough checks when employing staff to make sure they are fit to work with children. Overall, the leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

The school counsellor provides very effective support to individual pupils, and where needed, to their families as well. You feel, rightly, that having a counsellor has made a significant and positive impact on well-being of all across the school.

Inspection findings

- While pupils have been performing well in reading and writing in national curriculum tests at the end of key stage 2, their results in writing have not been as good. You and your leadership team have identified the reasons why: pupils were not routinely applying the grammar, punctuation and spelling they were being taught routinely in their writing. The range of actions you and your staff have taken to address this are having a positive impact.
- As we visited classrooms, spoke to pupils and looked at books, it was evident that there is much high-quality writing and the most able pupils in particular use language vividly and expressively to put their points across. Most pupils have a good range of vocabulary and are rarely short of ideas for stories or descriptions. One pupil, for example, describing a mythical character, the Iron Lady, wrote about how 'the wind sang through her fingers'. Some pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, still need the support to develop a wider vocabulary.
- Pupils are improving their routine use of grammar, spelling and punctuation when they write. However, spelling remains a weakness for a number of pupils and they need continued support. You have introduced phonics into Year 3 and this is helping pupils to strengthen their spelling as well as their reading. Some pupils, especially boys, are still struggling to produce clear, well-formed and legible handwriting. You are aware of this and working with the infant school on having a unified handwriting programme across the two schools.
- When we looked through topic books, where pupils record work they have done in other subjects, the opportunities for writing were not as regular as in English. Often the writing pupils completed tended to record what they had done or provide descriptive information about a topic rather than developing their ideas further and extending skills such as critical thinking and analysis. Some of these skills are evident in science work and more often seen in Years 5 and 6 than in Years 3 and 4.
- Pupils have performed well in mathematics in the last couple of years and there is a good trend of improvement in results in National Curriculum tests. Visits to classrooms and discussions with pupils indicate that this is because they are taught consistently well across the school. Teachers focus very well on getting pupils to think through problems and to explain their reasoning. Consequently, pupils develop a very secure understanding of mathematical ideas and processes.
- Pupils also do well in mathematics because work is well tailored to their needs and the most able pupils are extended and stretched well. This is down to very effective assessment of pupils' learning. The use of tablets and technology helps to individualise work. For example, where a pupil has not grasped a particular method or idea, they are given a tablet to work on. From this they can access videos and other support to help them practise and perfect key mathematical skills.

- The school makes good use of its pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils. Staff are aware of who these pupils are and individual support is targeted very carefully so as to maximise the impact. Funding has also been used well to ensure that attendance levels for disadvantaged pupils are as good as those of others. The school is aware of the barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils and this informs how you use the funding.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to strengthen pupils' spelling and improve the handwriting and vocabulary of key groups, especially boys
- further develop the opportunities for writing in subjects across the curriculum so that these enable pupils to deepen their understanding and skills in a wider range of writing.

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

Gulshanbir Kayembe
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other school leaders, two governors, including the chair, and pupils. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority and your school improvement partner. We visited all classrooms across the school with your deputy headteacher and looked at pupils' work in their books. I examined a range of documents, policies and assessment information. I took account of the Ofsted online questionnaire responses from 54 parents, as well as 37 written responses from parents. In addition, I considered 18 staff responses and 65 pupil responses to Ofsted surveys.