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Mrs Susan Shipp
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Shipp

Short inspection of Friar's Grove Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 February 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.

You have worked hard since your appointment in September to develop and strengthen a new leadership team. The final appointment you need to make will be completed in April 2018. The new leadership team is strong and enthusiastic. You have identified areas in which the school needs to further improve and put in place a series of actions that have been mapped out throughout the year. Supported by a strong governing body, you are ensuring that the standard of education at Friar's Grove remains securely good.

Pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. By the end of Year 6, pupils make good progress because teachers have good subject knowledge, plan lessons effectively and work hard to make lessons fun and interesting. Pupils say that they are proud to belong to the school and that all the staff care for them.

Since the last inspection, results have remained securely around the national average at the end of key stage 2 in each year and in each subject. In 2017, there was a dip in the overall performance in science, but this has been dealt with decisively and effectively through a subject review that identified a range of scientific areas that needed teaching in more detail. You have also ensured that teachers are given greater opportunity to discuss their teaching with their subject leader and receive more feedback on the areas where they can improve.

You have developed good systems to keep a close eye on the quality of teaching and provide guidance to teachers. Senior leaders and coordinators have been given more time this year to play a more influential management role. The school has implemented an outstanding subject leadership pack which supports leaders to take part in lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work and to discuss learning with them. This approach has been effective in helping the school target extra support at those areas of teaching and learning that need it most.

The quality of support for disadvantaged pupils is strong. Disadvantaged pupils are supported well so that their performance matches or exceeds that of others within the school. Last year, they achieved particularly well in writing at the end of key stage 2. Their performance is similarly strong in key stage 1 and in foundation stage. This is because the pupil premium funding has been used effectively in areas such as support for additional reading, extra feedback on how to improve learning and strategies to help with the social, emotional and behavioural needs of a range of pupils.

In lessons, pupils have positive attitudes to learning. They listen well and concentrate on tasks when asked to. A particular strength of the teaching is the quality of questioning used by adults in the class, which helps pupils think deeply about their learning. Pupils enjoy being challenged and say that learning in class is rarely disrupted. On the odd occasion when behaviour is not as good as it should be, the pupils say that teachers act quickly and that everyone is dealt with fairly.

Strong governance has supported the school in moving forward. Governors are passionate about raising standards and are actively involved in monitoring the school through visits and regular meetings. As a result, governors know the school well and hold the leadership to account effectively. They recently engaged in a voluntary self-evaluation exercise to find out their strengths and areas for development.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils are kept safe at school because leaders have ensured that it is given a high priority. Leaders have created an ethos where every member of staff cares about the safety and well-being of the pupils. All staff receive thorough and frequent training in safeguarding. Training records are kept up to date and catch-up sessions are held for anyone who misses the original session. Staff are vigilant when looking for signs of possible abuse. Senior staff make appropriate decisions when deciding whether to report concerns. Careful records are kept of the decision-making process and senior leaders ensure that they follow up any communications with outside agencies, so that pupils receive help and support in a timely fashion. Staff have also received training on radicalisation and extremism. Appointments follow best-practice guidance and once again records are meticulous.

The pupils I met said that they feel safe in school and a very large majority of parents and carers who responded to the Ofsted survey, Parent View, agreed. A small minority of parents raised bullying as a concern, so I investigated this. Pupils

told me that when there is any misbehaviour (which they say is rare), then it is dealt with quickly and fairly. The school has recently written and implemented a new anti-bullying policy. Inspection of school logs showed that incidents of bullying are recorded and dealt with quickly. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe when using the internet and appreciate the new 'Tell Someone' boxes that have been placed in school for them to raise concerns. These are checked every day.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we agreed to look at some specific aspects of the school's provision, including: how well leaders at all levels are supporting the progress of most-able pupils in key stage 2; the quality of teaching and learning in science; and how effectively teachers support reading across the school.
- Our first line of enquiry was to investigate the support given to most-able pupils in key stage 2. Last year, the progress of this group was in the top 40% nationally for reading, but below national averages in writing and mathematics. Good school self-evaluation identified these areas for improvement and you have taken decisive action to improve the rates of progress. We spent time together looking at the quality of writing produced by the most able pupils in key stage 2 and discussed their work with them. We found that pupils are enthusiastic writers and that they are given good support by their teachers to help their writing improve.
- Work scrutiny of the pupils' books showed that they were given a variety of tasks with challenging themes. Pupils from Year 5 and Year 6 were highly motivated and enjoyed talking about their writing styles and the strategies they used to interest those reading their work.
- The subject leader for English has worked hard to continue improvements in this area and uses weekly management time to monitor and evaluate what is happening in lessons.
- A strong focus on raising expectations in key stage 1 by improving the foundations for writing has been included in the school improvement plan. Overall, we found that the progress of the most able writers is likely to be broadly in line with the national figure this year.
- The school has introduced a 'mastery' approach to improving outcomes for the most able mathematicians. Expectations have been raised in terms of what is to be taught in each year group and there has been an increased focus on learning multiplication tables, deepening the learning in each year group, and improved training for staff.
- Our second line of enquiry was an investigation into the quality of teaching and learning in science. In 2017, science results at the end of key stage 2 were lower in comparison with the national average than were reading, writing or mathematics. Leaders were quick to spot this and their self-review identified that this was because the school curriculum had not responded to changes in the national curriculum and as a result, there were some areas that had not been evidenced to the depth required.
- Current school assessments show that the proportion of pupils on track to reach

the expected level in science by the end of Year 6 is much higher.

- The subject leader for science has been given more time to spend in class, observing lessons, talking to pupils and giving feedback to teachers. Observations of pupils in class and discussions show that the teaching of science is regular and effective, and that as a result, the majority of pupils are working at the expected level.
- Our final line of enquiry was to investigate how well reading is taught across the school, but particularly in key stage 1. We chose to investigate this area because in 2017, the proportion of the most able readers in key stage 1 reaching greater depth was less than the national average. We found that the teaching of reading has been given a high priority over the last two years and that standards this year are higher. In early years, children are making better than expected progress in their reading, with many reaching the expected level at the end of Reception.
- In Year 1, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level in the national phonics check is above average and this standard is likely to be maintained. Phonics teaching was observed during the inspection and this was characterised by high expectations, good subject knowledge among teachers, careful planning and a fast pace with lots of practice and repetition of key sounds.
- This year, progress in key stage 1 is likely to be in line with expectations and attainment will match the national averages. The most able readers are being given extra support through the additional focus on daily reading with teachers, support staff and parent volunteers.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- further embed and develop the recent strategies introduced to accelerate progress in key stage 2 so that it is above the national figure
- following the completion of the leadership restructure, develop and implement a vision that drives further improvement and is fully shared with all members of the school community.

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

Duncan Ramsey
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your team at the start of the day. We discussed your evaluation of the school's effectiveness and agreed the key areas I would focus on during the inspection. I also met with representatives of the governing body, the coordinator for English and members of staff responsible for safeguarding. I considered the 177 responses of parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 13 free-text comments.

I met with the leader for English and with two groups of pupils. We visited a number of classes together and looked at pupils' books. I spent time on the playground before school talking to parents. At lunchtime, I observed pupils in the key stage 1 and key stage 2 playgrounds and spent some time talking to a wide range of pupils about their experiences in school. I observed pupils' behaviour in classes.

I looked at a range of documents, including the school improvement plan. I also scrutinised the school's safeguarding systems, records and associated documents. I also examined the school's website.