

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mrs Ronnie Branch  
Sunnymede Junior School  
The Meadoway  
Billericay  
Essex  
CM11 2HL

Dear Mrs Branch

### **Short inspection of Sunnymede Junior School**

Following my visit to the school on 2 May 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 May 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

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

You are determined that pupils will do well and you ensure that they understand the school ethos of 'learning for a better tomorrow'. The school provides a happy and vibrant learning environment in which pupils feel safe, are well cared for and are encouraged to do their very best. Pupils behave extremely well, both in class and around school. They are respectful, courteous and supportive of the learning of others. By encouraging them to learn from their mistakes and take them as opportunities – 'mistakes are normal, we learn from them' – pupils understand the value of persevering.

Most parents and carers who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, expressed positive views about the school. One parent wrote, 'We feel incredibly lucky that our child has the chance to go to a good school.' The staff survey responses were universally positive and they reflect the complete confidence that staff have in your leadership.

Governance is a strength of the school. The governing body is extremely well led and governors provide challenge and support in equal measure. Governors are ambitious for the success of each pupil. They visit school regularly, gathering evidence to inform their understanding of the school's strengths and the improvements that are taking place. Governors use information effectively to challenge, as well as to commend, leaders on the quality of education provided.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to 'make more teaching outstanding and improve standards in writing and mathematics'. Following a period of significant staffing changes, we agreed that the quality of teaching is strengthening with the now stable staff. Staff implement the school's assessment policy consistently and, notably, standards in writing have improved as a result. School leaders know that teaching is not yet outstanding.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All of the checks and procedures meet statutory requirements. Child protection training is fully up to date for staff and governors.

All staff are very clear about the procedures they must follow, particularly for raising child protection concerns about pupils. Your records show that you work effectively with parents and outside agencies and thoroughly follow up any such concerns.

Pupils, staff and parents agree that the school is a safe and happy place. Pupils say that bullying is not a problem as teachers help to sort out any problems quickly. They appreciate that the school helps them to understand cycling safety, what to do in the event of a fire and how to stay safe online.

### **Inspection findings**

- In order to check that the school remains good, I followed a number of lines of enquiry. My first line of enquiry was to establish how well pupils achieve in mathematics. This is because, in the 2017 national tests in mathematics, pupils' attainment was below the national average and they had not made good progress from Year 3 to Year 6. I wanted to determine how well leaders are ensuring that pupils make better progress from their different starting points and how effectively pupils are taught mathematics skills.
- The subject leader for mathematics looked carefully at the reasons why most pupils at the end of key stage 2 in 2017 had not made good progress. Your subject leader identified that pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills were areas to further develop. You also agreed that some girls and disadvantaged pupils also could have done better. Your subject leader presented evidence during the inspection to show that a review of how mathematics is taught has taken place and the subsequent changes which were put in place have had a positive impact on pupils' achievement in mathematics.
- We looked at pupils' books and found that these showed a good range of mathematical skills being taught, including reasoning and problem-solving. In some classes, this has been successfully linked to other curriculum areas. The skills being taught are based on a strong foundation of number, which pupils confirmed has supported their understanding of fractions and being able to see patterns. They want to get better at recalling number problems more quickly. Pupils have increasingly more challenging learning experiences and, in particular, opportunities to recall and apply their knowledge.

- Governors understand the quality of teaching and outcomes of mathematics across the school as a result of the information that the subject leader shares. They know the impact of the range of strategies that have been put in place to support mathematical understanding. For example, they confidently talked about the focus on the use of resources, which has helped improve pupils' understanding. When we were in class, pupils told me that using the resources such as number blocks, clocks and protractors made mathematics make more sense, but they do not use these resources as much as they would like.
- Inspection evidence confirms that the teaching of mathematics is improving across the school, especially for girls and disadvantaged pupils.
- Secondly, I considered the achievement of the most able pupils and how leaders are ensuring that these pupils make strong progress across subjects. This is because the 2017 published assessment information in reading and mathematics shows that these pupils did not achieve as well as other pupils nationally. You had already identified the progress of the most able pupils as an area to improve this year.
- In Year 5, the most able pupils have been offered opportunities to effectively extend their thinking and understanding across a range of subjects. We saw pupils enthusiastically challenging their teacher to 'prove me wrong', using high-quality explanation. Even so, you agreed that, across the school, there remains scope to challenge the most able pupils further across all subjects, as well as having further opportunities to develop their skills to the level which they could be capable of achieving.
- The large majority of pupils experience a broad and balanced curriculum. Pupils have opportunities in science to test out hypotheses and make predictions to arrive at a conclusion. We agreed that there could be greater opportunity for pupils to develop subject-specific skills alongside English and mathematical skills.
- My final line of enquiry focused on what leaders are doing to promote good attendance. Attendance had been a strength of the school. However, over the last three years, attendance has declined and the proportion of pupils that were persistently absent from school has increased.
- The member of staff with responsibility for attendance was able to discuss the reasons why persistent absence rates have increased. Absence is closely monitored. The local home-school attendance officer, in conjunction with the school, follows up if a pupil is regularly not attending school or if absence appears unnecessary. Your deputy headteacher is working with a charity to support families to improve attendance and, as a result, these pupils have significantly improved attendance.
- You are aware that attendance overall has not yet improved. However, a number of pupils who were previously persistently absent are now more regularly in school as a result of the good level of support that the school offers.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching and learning in mathematics continue to improve, especially pupils' skills in reasoning mathematically and solving problems
- support and challenge in teaching and learning are more precisely targeted so that pupils, particularly the most able, make the progress of which they are capable across the curriculum
- attendance improves for those who are persistently absent.

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

Cassandra Williams  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

At the start of the inspection, we discussed the key lines of enquiry, the school's internal evaluation of its performance, plans for future improvement and information about current pupils' learning.

Documents, including the school's evaluation of its own performance and the school improvement plans, were evaluated. The school's safeguarding arrangements, records, files and documentation were examined. A discussion was held with the safeguarding leader.

Together, we observed pupils' learning in most classes. We looked at samples of pupils' work in each class to evaluate the progress pupils are making over time. I spoke informally with pupils during lessons regarding their learning. I also met with a group of pupils. I met with the chair of the governing body and two other governors.

The views of the 35 parents who responded to Parent View, the 30 staff who completed Ofsted's staff questionnaire and the 142 pupils who completed the online pupil questionnaire were taken into account. I considered 15 parental comments from the free-text service available during the inspection.