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Mr David Milligan
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Milligan

Short inspection of Gosbecks Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 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 September 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since you took up your post in September 2017, you and the assistant headteacher have built a strong team approach to school improvement. Your self-evaluation is accurate and founded on robust evidence. Although you identify next steps for improvement in your self-evaluation, these are not prioritised and not all of the next steps are carried through into the school improvement plan. You have ensured that the areas for improvement from the last inspection have been addressed.

You and the staff have worked hard to raise standards in reading and have identified that pupils' handwriting and presentation need to be improved. During the inspection, we agreed that, to improve the teaching of reading further, staff should review pupils' progress in phonics more regularly; this will ensure that pupils in Reception and key stage 1 are placed in the correct phonics group at the most appropriate time. You and the staff also need to agree how best to use the books that provide a record of each pupil's reading. At present, there is no consistent approach to how pupils check and record the meaning of words that they do not understand. In addition, we agreed that the school's approach to the teaching of handwriting is not sufficiently clear. Consequently, there are inconsistencies in the teaching of handwriting and in teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve from Reception to Year 6.

Pupils love coming to school because, as one pupil said: 'We get challenged to be the best we can be all the time and teachers are super kind. You can talk to them about anything.' Another pupil said: 'The teachers always try to make learning fun and they help you when you get stuck.' Pupils feel very safe at school. One pupil explained that: 'Sometimes, we fall out over football games but we sort this out ourselves, or we get an adult to help us. You make good friends here and learn well.' Most of the 44 responses to the pupil questionnaire were positive about the school.

The vast majority of parents and carers are very pleased with the school. For example, one parent said: 'This wasn't our first choice of school but we are really pleased we made the decision to come here. My child is making really good progress.' Another parent said:

'My children have always been encouraged and enjoy working hard to be the best they can be, always wanting to achieve the next level. Their maths and English are above average for their age and this all comes down to the good teaching received.'

A very small number of parents raised concerns about provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and about bullying. However, inspection evidence indicates that you and your staff do everything you can to ensure that pupils are safe and that their needs are met.

Governors give effective support and challenge to you and senior leaders. This is because they know the school well through their regular, sharply focused visits. For example, the governor responsible for the allocation of pupil premium funding recently reported: 'The pupils talked with confidence about how they have overcome challenges in their work due to the additional support they have received.'

Safeguarding is effective.

My first line of enquiry was about your actions to raise attendance and reduce persistent absence and fixed-period exclusions, ensuring that all pupils are safe. You have taken immediate and highly effective action to raise attendance and reduce persistent absence. The termly attendance meetings with parents, combined with a strong focus on celebrating good attendance with pupils through assemblies and the regular newsletter, have raised attendance to close to average and reduced persistent absence to well below the national average.

You have developed a very strong inclusion team and have introduced a highly successful nurture provision. Consequently, fixed-period exclusions have reduced considerably since September and are now well below average. Those pupils who find it hard to cope in the classroom find the opportunity to spend time in a quiet environment calms their mood, enabling them rapidly to re-join their classmates.

All safeguarding processes and procedures meet requirements. You have three designated leaders for safeguarding, two of whom are senior leaders. You work

together to ensure that the most vulnerable pupils and their families receive the most appropriate level of support to meet their needs. You keep detailed and careful records that indicate how closely you work with external agencies. You follow up any referrals you make rigorously and tenaciously.

Inspection findings

- My second line of enquiry was about whether pupils identified as having SEN and/or disabilities make the same progress as other pupils. The assistant headteacher is the SEN and/or disabilities co-ordinator. She works with parents, teachers and external specialists to ensure that pupils' needs are identified as soon as possible. Additional funding is used effectively to ensure that staff have appropriate training to support pupils' specific needs and that pupils have the equipment to help them make good progress. Consequently, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make very similar progress to other pupils and, in some cases, they make accelerated progress.
- My third line of enquiry focused on whether pupil premium funding is helping to close the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally. You and the assistant headteacher have started to evaluate the impact of the interventions you have put in place for disadvantaged pupils. In September 2017, you introduced half-termly standards meetings with teachers. These meetings focus on any pupil who is not making the progress they are capable of, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. Sometimes, a pupil will be in both of these categories. At the meetings, provision to overcome barriers to learning is discussed in depth and interventions are adjusted to best support learning and progress. For example, you have introduced 'quality first teaching' (QFT) sessions in all classes. In QFT time, the teacher teaches pupils who need additional help to develop their knowledge and understanding. The impact of this strategy has been significant, especially for disadvantaged pupils. The school's own performance information indicates that these pupils are catching up more rapidly because of this approach.
- My final line of enquiry was to evaluate the impact of the school's approach to teaching systematic synthetic phonics in Reception and key stage 1. In addition, I wanted to check that pupils in key stage 2, particularly middle prior-attaining pupils, are making good progress in reading from their starting points in Year 3. Phonics teaching in Reception and key stage 1 is effective, because teachers have worked together to develop a systematic synthetic approach that is consistent and progresses carefully through the different stages of learning in phonics. Teaching assistants are carefully trained and work effectively with their teaching groups. Currently, teachers and leaders check that pupils are placed in the most appropriate phonics group every half term. However, this is not frequent enough, as some pupils make very rapid progress so could be moving through the groups at a faster pace and others need additional time to learn particular sounds.
- You have introduced a computer-based reading programme in key stage 2. This is having a positive impact on pupils' motivation to read more books and on their ability to understand what they are reading. As a result, pupils are making good

progress from their starting points, including middle prior attainers. For example, all the pupils I read with in key stage 2 were very enthusiastic about the new computer-based reading system and were able to give me a detailed account of the plot of their book before we started to read. Although the new approach enables teachers to track pupils' book choices, you have retained the special book to record pupils' reading choices. It is not clear how this book should be used. In addition, in key stage 1 it is not clear what adults are expected to write in the 'reading record book'. In both key stages, it is unclear how pupils should record and check the meaning of words they do not understand when they are reading.

- During our walk round the phonics groups and in our work scrutiny of pupils' written work in key stage 2, it was evident that there is not a consistent approach to the teaching of handwriting from Reception to Year 6. Teachers do not appear to have sufficiently high expectations for how neat and careful pupils should be.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the next steps identified in the school's self-evaluation are prioritised and included within the school improvement plan
- teachers and leaders frequently check that pupils in Reception and key stage 1 are placed in the most appropriate phonics group to support their learning of phonics and reading
- staff and parents are clear about the purpose of reading record books in supporting the development of pupils' reading
- pupils are clear about when and where to record words they do not understand when they are reading
- there is a consistent approach to the teaching of handwriting through the school and all staff have high expectations for the quality of pupils' written work.

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

Julie Winyard

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with you, the assistant headteacher, the governors, a representative from the local authority, the designated safeguarding leads, the staff, pupils and parents. We observed learning and teaching in Reception and key stage 1. I read with pupils in Reception, Year 1, Year 2, Year 5 and Year 6. I scrutinised a range of documents, including your self-evaluation and school improvement plan. I scrutinised pupils' writing in English and other subjects with you and the assistant headteacher. I looked at a range of safeguarding documentation and a sample of pupil files. I scrutinised 32 responses to Parent View, the online questionnaire for parents, 30 responses to the online staff questionnaire and 44 responses to the online pupil questionnaire.