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18 June 2018

Mrs Alex Freaks
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Freaks

Short inspection of Ramsey Manor Lower School

Following my visit to the school on 6 June 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 November 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Following the previous inspection, leaders were asked to raise pupils' achievement by ensuring that teaching activities were suitably challenging for all pupils, including the most able. Subsequently, pupils' achievement in reading has risen in all year groups. However, leaders' actions to accelerate pupils' progress in writing have not been as effective for pupils currently in the school. In addition, although actions to improve pupils' achievement in mathematics have seen a rise in standards by the end of key stage 1, progress in mathematics is variable across year groups. Finally, the development of children's writing and mathematical knowledge and skills in the early years, from their different starting points, does not represent strong progress.

During the current academic year, you have worked to bring about improvements in the quality of teaching and to pupils' achievement. Leaders have introduced new approaches to the teaching of writing and mathematics and new curriculum plans reflect this drive. However, while these priorities for improvement are the right ones, the teaching of writing and mathematics for younger pupils is not yet secure enough to give them the knowledge and skills they need to progress through the different year groups of the school. In addition, you agreed that teachers in the early years need to set higher expectations for children so that they are provided with activities which are suitably matched to their capabilities upon entry to the

school. You and your leadership team also believe that the behaviour of a small minority of children in the early years and pupils in Year 1 needs to improve.

Staff and governors agree with the improvement priorities you and your senior team have set. The school's strong values, which include 'respect, appreciation, tolerance, safety and peace', are consistently promoted in classroom relationships between teachers and pupils. Consequently, pupils across the year groups appreciate the work of their teachers to help them in their learning and personal development.

Parents and carers are very supportive of the school, and the vast majority would recommend it to others. They appreciate the work of leaders and teachers to help their children settle into early years. Parents also believe that their children are safe. The parents of those pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, or who join the school at times other than the start of the school year, speak very positively about how you care for their children and help them settle in. These strengths have attracted parents to send their children to the school. However, a small number of parents do not believe the school manages the behaviour of pupils effectively.

Governors are committed to their role and offer an accurate view about the school's performance and those areas which need to be improved. The large size of the governing body also reflects its commitment and the strong local support you have secured for the school's work. Governors visit regularly and undertake a range of activities to check on the performance of the school. As a result, they are well informed about the school's performance and are able to hold leaders to account.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have brought about improvements to the school's arrangements for safeguarding in the current academic year. They have introduced a system which allows all staff to report and record any safeguarding concerns with confidence. Leaders are able to use these records to act on concerns with greater efficiency than was the case in the past. Previously, arrangements for staff to record and report their concerns about pupils were less secure. Leaders have also improved the way in which they act to communicate any concerns to the appropriate agencies.

Leaders ensure that staff are suitably trained. Leaders use the latest government guidance to help staff appreciate potential risks to pupils and how to respond. As a result, staff act quickly to report concerns and know the procedures.

Pupils feel safe and are confident about how to avoid risk when using the internet and communication technology. Checks on the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children are complete and effective.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain whether the school remains good, one of my lines of enquiry focused on the progress made by children in the early years and the quality of teaching in the provision. This included whether the expectations of teachers were high enough in order to provide children with suitably challenging work, taking account of their starting points. Children's levels of development in 2016 and 2017 suggested that some children had not made the strong progress they were capable of by the end of Reception Year.
- Children in the Reception Year do not make strong progress, particularly in writing and mathematics. In mathematics, teaching activities do not sufficiently challenge children, including the most able, to secure, extend and deepen their number knowledge. In writing, teaching activities do not sufficiently develop the accuracy of children's handwriting, letter formation or early sentence skills.
- My second line of enquiry focused on pupils' achievement in writing and mathematics, and the quality of teaching for both subjects across key stage 1 and key stage 2. This included how well teachers use their knowledge of what pupils are able to do, in order to plan activities which help them make strong progress. Test results for writing in both 2016 and 2017 suggested that some pupils had not reached the standards they should by the end of Year 2. Although pupils' achievement had improved in Year 2 mathematics tests, your own school development plan sets out the need to improve pupils' progress in mathematics across different year groups.
- Leaders' assessment records show that current pupils' progress in writing is slow in Years 1, 2 and 3, while they are near to the expected attainment for their age in Year 4. Pupils' progress in mathematics is sufficient to help them reach near to expected standards for their age in Year 2 and the expected attainment in Years 3 and 4. However, other than in Year 2, where more pupils are reaching greater depth, few older pupils are making the progress required to reach the higher standards in mathematics. Progress in mathematics is not as strong in Year 1, and attainment is lower, with very few pupils reaching greater depth.
- Teaching does not provide the level of challenge to develop pupils' mathematical and writing skills thoroughly in key stage 2. Work is frequently similar for pupils of different abilities, and activities do not enable pupils to work at sufficient depth. In writing, pupils do not have enough opportunity for extended pieces or to develop their vocabulary in subjects other than history or English. In mathematics, work is often focused on easier arithmetic, with less attention given to more challenging problem solving, reasoning and calculations. Consequently, fewer pupils are reaching higher attainment in Years 3 and 4.
- The quality of teaching varies between year groups and subjects. In Year 1, writing books show that pupils' handwriting and sentence skills are not improving quickly enough, following their slower progress in early years. In mathematics, their workbooks show that teaching is not sufficiently demanding and work is often too easy for pupils of different abilities. However, in Year 2, mathematics teaching is more successful, and planning takes account of pupils' previous learning. As a result, pupils are able to use their knowledge more thoroughly and

develop a deeper understanding of number and calculation. Despite this, their progress in writing is slower, particularly in the development of their written skills in subjects other than English.

- Leaders responsible for mathematics and English hold accurate views about the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. This has led to curriculum development plans which make raising standards a priority and carefully select development activities for staff. However, it is too soon to be sure of their impact.
- My third line of enquiry was concerned with pupils' behaviour. You and your leaders believe that behaviour has not been consistently good in the early years. Current evidence demonstrates that behaviour has improved in the Reception Year and Year 1. However, there are still occasions when some children in Reception and pupils in Year 1 lose interest because activities are undemanding and they fail to give their best effort to their work.
- My final line of enquiry was concerned with pupils' attendance. In recent years, pupils' overall attendance has improved, but the persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils has risen. You and your leaders have worked effectively with the local authority and with parents to challenge high levels of absence and encourage regular attendance. Consequently, you have brought about a reduction in persistent absence for all groups of pupils in the current year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers' expectations are raised for all children in early years so that they are supported to develop their handwriting and number skills securely during the Reception Year
- all teachers use assessment information to plan work which is suitably challenging for pupils of different abilities
- pupils in key stages 1 and 2 are provided with more opportunities to develop their extended writing skills in subjects across the wider curriculum, as well as in English
- pupils in key stages 1 and 2 are provided with activities which challenge them to apply their mathematical knowledge to more demanding problems, so that they can thoroughly develop their skills and understanding
- subject leaders and senior staff act with greater urgency in order to drive improvement more quickly and challenge all teachers to raise standards.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Central Bedfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Turner
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, I met with you, senior leaders and two members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. I also met with seven members of staff to discuss their safeguarding knowledge and training. I visited lessons in all year groups, looked at pupils' work in books, folders and on display and spoke with pupils throughout the day. In some lesson visits, I was accompanied by yourself. I also held a meeting with pupils from key stages 1 and 2. I met with a local authority adviser. I reviewed school documentation, including the self-evaluation report and school improvement plan, assessment information, policies and information posted on the website. I scrutinised a range of documentation about the school's safeguarding work, including the single central record, safeguarding training and leaders' systems for managing information and staff concerns. I took account of 63 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, 57 free-text comments from parents and 12 responses to the online staff questionnaire. I also took account of the views of 10 parents I met at the start of the school day.