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Mrs Rita Tingle
Headteacher
Prettygate Junior School
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Dear Mrs Tingle

Short inspection of Prettygate Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 27 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 October 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

You and your deputy headteacher have a clear and exciting vision for the school. You both understand and agree about the strengths of the school and areas which you want to improve; consequently your working relationship is very effective. Your self-evaluation is accurate and the plan you have written to address areas you wish to improve is unambiguous and measurable.

You told me that growing the cultural capital (cultural ideas, places and experiences) of the pupils in your care is a key priority. To make this happen, you ensure that pupils experience a rich and varied curriculum, both in school and through interaction with the wider world, which this year has included, for the older pupils, visits to Colchester Museum and the Imperial War Museum Duxford. Younger pupils have been to a country park, the Ipswich Museum and Colchester Zoo.

Pupils weave these experiences into their writing back in school. For example, pupils working this term on a Second World War project have produced high-quality pieces of writing about aspects of the war, which are prominently displayed in the school hall. Year 6 pupils read 'Gorilla Dawn', which highlights the plight of gorillas whose natural habitat is being destroyed by illegal mining. This moved pupils to write persuasive letters to their local Member of Parliament (MP) to highlight this environmental issue. They were rewarded with a ministerial reply and an invitation to discuss this problem with their MP during a recent visit to the Houses of

Parliament. Pupils have also experienced a mock evacuee day, which helped them to empathise with displaced children around the world.

The school offers pupils a wide range of sporting opportunities and pupils spoke enthusiastically about enjoying football, using the new play pod and keeping healthy. Pupils are polite, well behaved around the school and enthusiastic learners in lessons. They work willingly together and those spoken to during the inspection agreed that the school was like a 'family'.

A very large majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree that their children enjoy coming to school are safe and make good progress. Responses to the staff questionnaire show they are proud to work at the school.

You, your staff and governors put the welfare of pupils at the heart of the school and care for each pupil as an individual. The parent of a pupil whom you and governors supported recently wrote, 'The school is doing everything it can and more to help and guide my child educationally and emotionally.'

Governors visit the school frequently and know it well. They have a clear understanding of the priorities for improvement and offer appropriate support and challenge. The school can draw on the wide range of expertise that governors can offer.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that all pre-employment checks are completed in line with statutory requirements. Records of concerns are logged meticulously and in a timely fashion. You, as the designated safeguarding lead, take appropriate actions, including with outside agencies, to ensure that children are kept safe. Staff and governors receive relevant and regular training.

Pupils reported that they feel very safe in the school. They understand well how to keep themselves safe on the internet and the dangers of grooming. They stated that bullying is very rare and, should it occur, that staff always deal with it quickly and effectively. They said they all have an adult they can speak to if worried. A very few parents raised concerns about bullying through Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View; however, inspection evidence indicates that you and your staff do all you can to keep pupils safe.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was to see how well leaders had addressed areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. I particularly focused on how well you are identifying pupils who need to catch up in mathematics and writing. Additionally, I wanted to find out whether teachers consistently challenge pupils to reach the highest standards across all subject areas.
- Key stage 2 results in 2017 showed that the proportion of pupils who entered the

school with middle prior attainment achieving the expected standard in writing, mathematics and science was lower than national figures. In mathematics, the proportion of these pupils meeting the higher standard was also below the national average. Pupils who entered key stage 2 with higher prior attainment achieved broadly in line with, but not better than, the national average.

- You have identified the importance of closely tracking pupil's progress to ensure that they receive the necessary support to make strong improvements in their knowledge, skills and understanding. You and your deputy have put in place a new assessment system to ensure that pupil progress is checked regularly and used to inform teachers' planning.
- We visited a number of mathematics lessons together and witnessed how teachers have used assessment information to adjust their planning over time. Leaders have ensured, for current pupils, that problem-solving and reasoning are taught systematically, so that most pupils acquire these skills well.
- Teachers have used their expertise to plan interesting and engaging opportunities for pupils to learn and secure their understanding of mathematical skills, such as the use of straws to consolidate their knowledge of quadrilaterals. The pupils we spoke to could explain how they have reached an answer with confidence and certainty. Those who find tasks more challenging are very well supported by other adults who understand their particular needs. Therefore, most pupils make good progress from their respective starting points.
- However, teachers do not provide the most able mathematicians with regular opportunities to develop sophisticated reasoning by considering and reflecting on their selection of approaches to mathematical problems. As a result, pupils do not extend their skills, understanding or knowledge of mathematics and do not make the rapid progress they are capable of.
- We agreed that current pupils' workbooks and the school's assessment information indicate that effective teaching has allowed most pupils to make good progress in mathematics. Consequently, more pupils this year are likely to reach the expected standard at the end of Year 6. However, not all of the most capable mathematicians are consistently producing work of the very highest standard. The most able pupils do not receive sufficient challenge to extend their mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding. As a result, the most able pupils do not make rapid progress.
- In response to the previous inspection report, you and your senior team have re-written the curriculum to improve the teaching of writing and deepen the knowledge and understanding that pupils acquire in the foundation subjects. Middle leaders are enthusiastic about this new approach to learning and are working together to ensure that the implementation of the curriculum is coherent and raises standards across all subject areas. They told me how pupils are using their mathematical skills to create models of ancient pyramids and Second World War victory gardens. The use of other cross-curricular themes, for example the rain forests, the Vikings and a Skellig art project, are enlivening writing across all year groups.
- You showed me wonderful displays of high-quality, imaginative writing, evidencing pupil progress across all ages, from the start of the school year.

These displays celebrate the work of every pupil and include poems, diary entries, letters, persuasive writing and stories. Pupils and staff can look back at these together and see the strong progress made in writing through the year. The most recent pieces pupils have written indicate that the vast majority of pupils currently in the school are writing at a level of age-related expectations, with many exceeding age-related expectations, including those in Year 6.

- However, when we looked together at pupils' current workbooks across the wider range of subjects, we saw that teachers do not encourage or expect pupils to apply their writing skills to the same high level as seen in English work. Although gains in pupils' acquisition of knowledge and skills were evident, this did not reflect the same strong progress seen in English and mathematics. You have already identified this deficit, and you and your leaders have already implemented plans to make further improvements. However, it is too early to judge the impact of these improvements.
- My next line of enquiry focused on how leaders are ensuring that disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make better progress, which is at least in line with the progress made by pupils nationally. This is because in 2017, the proportions of disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was considerably below other pupils nationally. In addition, many pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities did not make the same progress as others from similar starting points nationally.
- You have ensured that assessment information is used effectively to identify pupils needing extra support. Your precise understanding of the barriers some pupils face allows you to target additional government funding to greatest effect. For example, you have worked hard to ensure that persistent absence has fallen for disadvantaged pupils, so it is now moving rapidly towards national figures. As a result, inspection evidence and the school's own assessment information point to a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils at the end of Year 6 making similar progress to their classmates and to others nationally in mathematics and English.
- Governors appointed a new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) in September 2017. This provision is well led and new systems to monitor the effectiveness of interventions, which include clear, measurable success criteria, are now embedded. Leaders review the provision for pupils who are not making the progress they are capable of and adjust it accordingly. There is now a focus on supporting teachers to adapt their planning, so that pupils' needs are primarily met by high-quality teaching. Together, we saw the positive impact of this work in a number of lessons and through pupils' work. Assessment information produced by the school suggests that a higher proportion of current pupils in Year 6 who have SEN and/or disabilities are making good progress across the curriculum than in 2017.
- My final line of enquiry was to consider how well pupils achieve in reading. This is because progress in reading has been significantly below average for the last two years, and in 2017 the proportions of pupils reaching the higher standard was below national figures.

- Reading is celebrated and encouraged throughout the school. Pupils have chosen new books for the library that match their tastes and interests and which offer appropriate challenge. During the inspection, an outside speaker presented first prize to pupils in the school for winning a national writing competition based on the work of Rudyard Kipling.
- I listened to some pupils read challenging texts, and they impressed me with their fluency, their intonation and their inferences about characters in the story. Pupils could also predict what might happen next. They told me about the genres they liked best and could name a large number of books they had read this year. They, and others throughout the day, told me how much they enjoy reading and how they read at home 'for pleasure'.
- We saw a Year 6 English lesson together, where pupils were comparing the similarities between two texts founded in Greek mythology, 'Theseus and the Minotaur' and 'Icarus and Daedalus'. Pupils' contributions were articulate and well founded. They understood these thought-provoking texts well and made remarkable comparisons and suggestions about the themes of the stories. Support from additional adults enabled all pupils to access the lesson and enjoy making strong progress in their skills of comprehension.
- School assessment information shows that due to an enhanced focus on reading a range of genres and developing pupils' understanding of how writers convey meaning, the proportion of pupils making rapid progress in reading has increased.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more pupils reach the higher standard in mathematics by the end of key stage 2
- teachers provide more opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills in other areas of the curriculum to the same standard that they achieve in English.

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

Kay Leach
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher, four subject leaders, the SENCo and three members of your governing body, including the chair. I also spoke to parents before the start of school and a representative of the local authority. I held discussions with some pupils from all classes, spoke to other pupils throughout the day and listened to three pupils read. I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including the school's self-evaluation, plans for and records of the use of additional funding, analysis of pupil's attendance, bullying logs and the school's assessment information.

I took account of 62 responses to Parent View, together with 58 free-text comments. I considered 32 staff responses to the Ofsted questionnaire and 87 responses by pupils to the Ofsted questionnaire.

I checked the school's safeguarding records, including child protection and safeguarding paperwork and records of checks that leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with pupils. I observed teaching and learning jointly with you and your deputy. I looked at pupil's work in the classroom and considered with you progress evident in a number of pupils' workbooks.