

2 October 2018

Mrs Ann Robinson
Headteacher
Buttsbury Junior School
Norsey View Drive
Billericay
Essex
CM12 0QR

Dear Mrs Robinson

Short inspection of Buttsbury Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 12 September 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 March 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Buttsbury Junior School is a remarkably lively, friendly and welcoming place. Pupils and staff are exceptionally proud of their school. The Buttsbury spirit was admirably reflected in the words of one parent, when they said, 'We cherish our school. We feel privileged to be part of the Buttsbury community.'

Without exception, every parent I spoke with during the inspection was overwhelmingly positive about the work of the whole school team. All the parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, said that they would recommend the school to others. Many of the text messages they sent to me during the inspection were highly effusive about the quality of education that the school provides and about your leadership.

Parents' comments, and the evidence from my time in the school, left me in no doubt about the high regard in which you are held. It was impressive how eager parents were to tell me, 'The headteacher is incredible! She has turned the school around.' Another parent added to this when they said, 'The passion that she has radiates down to the teachers and through to the children,' with a final quote

summarising the feelings of many, 'She is amazing! She is all over everything!'

Since the previous inspection, you have worked tirelessly together with other leaders, teaching staff and governors to secure the recommended improvements that inspectors noted in the report. In doing so, you have not only addressed the issues raised but have also continued to improve the quality of education that the school provides. The carefully considered changes you have put in place are ensuring that pupils now have a much clearer understanding of what they need to do to improve their work.

Teachers' planning for learning is now deeply rooted in making certain that pupils of all abilities, including the most able, achieve their very best. Middle leaders and subject leads have become increasingly confident in their roles. They value the high-quality support available to them in the school and through wider professional development with external partners. Several of your current leaders initially joined Buttsbury Junior School as newly qualified teachers because of your well-established links with a local teacher training provider.

Your process for evaluating the school's performance draws suitably on the range of experience that governors bring and the contribution of staff at all levels. Development priorities are accurate and rooted in continuous improvement. As a result, pupils' overall attainment in reading, writing and mathematics reflects an upward trend. You have taken very successful action to address a dip in Year 6 pupils' progress in reading in 2017. This has led to marked improvements. The gaps between outcomes for boys and girls are closing across the school. This work is continuing in the current year, alongside plans to ensure that all pupils make consistently strong progress in writing. You are also continuing to check that teachers' assessments of pupils' writing are as accurate as they can be.

Across subjects, the curriculum is thoughtfully focused on securing strong foundations of knowledge, while considering the development of pupils' personal and social skills as well as meeting their academic needs. Pupils' confidence and ability to cooperate with others are testament to leaders' well-measured curriculum intentions.

Classrooms are lively and vibrant environments with colourful and interesting displays that are closely linked to pupils' work. Pupils' attendance is consistently above the national average. They are excited to learn. In illustrating this, one parent said, 'My daughter is happy, loves going to school. She comes home full of beans, excitement about her lessons and what she has been taught. It is a complete joy!'

Safeguarding is effective.

As designated safeguarding lead, you are tenacious in your determination to ensure that a consistently strong culture of safeguarding is well established in the school. Consequently, all the staff, pupils and parents I spoke with during the inspection, and those who responded to Ofsted's questionnaires, agreed that Buttsbury Junior

School is a safe place to learn. Pupils are knowledgeable about how to keep safe. They understand the rules to follow when using the internet. Helpful information is available for parents and carers to access on the school's website and through in-school workshops.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All required staff training is in place and frequently updated. The necessary employment checks are carried out prior to new staff joining the school. Governors take their safeguarding responsibilities very seriously. You make sure that they are kept fully informed about safeguarding matters through regular reports to the whole governing body.

Safeguarding is a standing agenda item at every staff meeting. In our discussions, you told me about the checks that you make in these meetings to be certain that everyone has a secure understanding of their responsibilities. You encourage staff to be appropriately curious when they are concerned. Records are suitably detailed. You are meticulous in following up on the issues raised, seeking local authority advice as required. Your persistence when working with external agencies makes sure that vulnerable pupils get the support they need quickly.

Inspection findings

- In looking at my first line of enquiry, we considered the effectiveness of arrangements to support the leadership of teaching and learning. We focused particularly on how well leaders' actions were raising standards across the school. This was because, while pupils typically attain standards that are significantly above the national average and make strong progress, in 2017, pupils' progress in reading dipped to around the national figure. The outcomes showed that girls made much better progress than boys.
- Working closely with other leaders, you lost no time in taking further steps to be certain that the whole-school approach to reading was as effective in capturing boys' enthusiasm as it was for girls. Consequently, early information from the 2018 national tests represents a rapid and marked improvement, indicating no significant gaps between either group. Indeed, in-school assessment information shows that any remaining gaps are closing rapidly across all groups.
- It is clear from our discussions, my discussions with school staff, our observations of pupils' learning and from looking at their books, that teaching continues to improve. You have sustained a relentless focus on evaluating the impact of teachers' work through regular reviews of each aspect of learning. Teachers have greater confidence because of the specialist support available to them through subject leaders. This is evident both in core and in foundation subjects. Swift action is taken where any further training or specific intervention is needed.
- Well-focused improvements in teachers' planning are ensuring that the most able pupils are challenged more consistently to achieve well. Disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, are making stronger progress across year groups.

- In following up on my next line of enquiry, I considered how well pupils understand how to improve their work. You explained to me how the school's marking and feedback policy has been revised to address previous inconsistencies in teachers applying it.
- Information from my observations, reviews of pupils' work and discussions with pupils and their teachers indicates that the new strategies are making a difference. For example, in lessons, pupils could explain to me what they needed to do to take their work to the next stage. In explaining the policy, teachers told me that their views about workload were listened to before any changes were made. They said that the model was now 'more streamlined' and that feedback to the pupils was 'more meaningful'. Their comments reflected the first-hand evidence and improved consistency in meeting your expectations that I saw during the day.
- While there are many improvements in the school's current performance, you are clear that pupils' progress in writing remains a key development priority. You are acutely aware that there is more work to do to ensure that teachers' assessments are as accurate as they can be. This is especially important at the point when pupils join the school in Year 3 and in final assessments towards the end of Year 6. Work to secure these improvements is already under way.
- We also considered how your subject leaders are working to implement a 'mastery' approach to curriculum planning. You explained to me how this is designed to ensure that pupils' progress is built on strong foundations of knowledge and deep learning. I saw how leaders' regular checks on learning are making certain that pupils can apply the things that they know in increasingly complex situations. They are also helping teachers to improve their work and to share good practice across subjects.
- I agreed with you that your curriculum is broad and balanced, giving high priority to pupils' personal development needs alongside other learning. Pupils' personal and social skills were very evident in the conversations that I had with them in lessons, in the dining hall and as they played so well together. They were eager to tell me about the impressive range of opportunities to take part in music, sport, and pre-and-after school clubs, and so were their parents.
- These discussions, as linked to my final line of enquiry about pupils' behaviour, made it crystal clear that Buttsbury pupils love their school. Most have very positive attitudes to learning and typically behave very well. Caring relationships between pupils, coupled with a thirst for learning and enthusiastic play, are prevalent inside the school and outdoors. It is no surprise that pupils' attendance is consistently above the national average and persistent absence remains very low.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' progress in writing across all year groups consistently matches the progress they make in reading and mathematics
- they continue to refine the accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils' writing, so that information is as precise as it can be in judging pupils' progress from when they join the school in Year 3 to the end of key stage 2.

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

Christine Dick
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other school leaders and teachers, and with three governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke with pupils informally in classrooms and around the school. Together with you and your assistant headteacher, I observed pupils' learning in lessons and looked at their work in books. I reviewed a range of documents, including those linked to child protection and safeguarding, alongside the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, as well as information related to pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour. I took account of the views of the parents I spoke to at the school gate. I also looked at parents' responses to Parent View, the free-text comments they sent to me during the inspection and heard about your analysis of the school's own survey of parents' views.