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Mrs Natalie Sansom  
Headteacher  
Branfil Primary School  
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Essex  
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Dear Mrs Sansom

### **Short inspection of Branfil Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 15 November 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 July 2014

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

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

Following your appointment in September 2016, you acted decisively to raise expectations and reverse the decline in pupils' outcomes. Crucially, you have made sure that pupils receive effective teaching and are challenged to aim high. You have developed a team of skilled leaders, who have helped you to realise your vision for the school. Under your leadership, pupils now make good progress and typically attain standards that are at least in line with their peers nationally by the end of key stages 1 and 2. You are determined that the improvements you have overseen are maintained. This is evident in your accurate evaluation of the school's effectiveness and plans for development.

You have made many changes since taking up post. Your decision-making has been focused on strategies that will make the most difference to how well pupils learn. The Branfil 'Teaching and learning handbook' provides clear guidance for staff on what you expect. Alongside this, you have invested in professional development opportunities for staff, including middle leaders. You encourage staff to share effective practice and use research to identify what could be improved further. Staff were positive about how you hold them to account for pupils' outcomes but match this with helpful support and guidance. Equally, staff spoke highly of how you manage change, including seeking their views and taking their well-being into consideration.

Since the previous inspection, new governors have been appointed and roles and responsibilities have been reviewed. These changes have had a positive effect. The governing body provides leaders with well-focused support and challenge. You and your governors have also worked closely with local authority advisers to check the impact of leaders' actions and develop leadership at all levels, for instance by putting in place additional support for leaders who are new to their roles.

Pupils are proud of their school and behave well. They told inspectors that the school is a 'very friendly place to be', and that teachers motivate them to 'work hard' and 'try new challenges', including in art, sport and music. Pupils benefit from many opportunities to contribute to school life, as peer mentors, house captains and through the school council. Pupils appreciate these opportunities and are keen to take on responsibility. For example, they have recently organised an anti-bullying march with schools from the local area.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders and staff place high priority on pupils' welfare and safety. Through the curriculum, pupils are taught how to stay safe. For example, pupils attend workshops run by external agencies so that they know about personal safety and 'stranger danger'. Pupils understand that the internet can be both 'safe and unsafe'. They spoke knowledgeably about how to avoid risks online, such as not 'giving out personal details to someone, even if they pretend to be your friend'. Pupils are confident that there is always a member of staff available to help them if they are worried or feel unsafe. They said that bullying is 'not a problem at our school', but staff would manage any incidents effectively. School records confirm that this is the case. The majority of parents and carers agree that their children feel safe and happy in school.

Staff receive regular and relevant safeguarding training in order to promote a culture of vigilance. Staff know about different risks and keep a close eye on pupils' welfare. Since the previous inspection, leaders have introduced a new online method for reporting and responding to child protection concerns. Staff understand and follow this system consistently. Records are detailed and of high quality. Leaders are alerted promptly to pupils who may be vulnerable, and take effective action to keep pupils safe, including involving external agencies when necessary.

### **Inspection findings**

- We agreed that I would focus on three areas in order to judge whether the school continued to provide pupils with a good standard of education. The first of these areas was pupils' reading outcomes in key stage 2.
- When you joined the school in 2016, pupils' reading progress during key stage 2 had declined and was weak in comparison to other schools nationally. To address this, you implemented a new approach to the teaching of reading, based on high-quality texts for pupils of all abilities. This has been successful. Pupils typically make good progress in reading. By the end of key stage 2, the proportion of Year 6 pupils attaining and exceeding the age-expected standard has improved

considerably. In 2018, provisional information shows it was above other schools nationally.

- Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They question pupils effectively to make sure that they understand what they read and can identify different techniques the author has used. For example, Year 6 pupils used their knowledge of metaphors, personification and onomatopoeia to analyse and perform a poem confidently. You recognise that widening pupils' vocabulary is crucial to strengthening their comprehension skills, and consequently this is given appropriate emphasis in the teaching of reading. Teachers anticipate words that pupils may be unfamiliar with and ensure that pupils know the meaning of these words. Pupils said that they find this approach helpful.
- You have also ensured that pupils have positive attitudes to reading. As one pupil put it: 'Reading is important because being a good reader helps you do well in all subjects.' However, although pupils read often for pleasure, the range of authors and genres they choose is narrow. Teachers do not routinely guide pupils to choose books that make them think hard and stretch their vocabulary, and, in turn, deepen their comprehension skills.
- The second area of focus was on reading in key stage 1 and the early years. I considered the impact of leaders' work to make sure pupils become accurate and fluent readers at the earliest possible stage.
- The work of you and your team has secured the necessary improvements in the teaching of early reading. Teaching gives due weight to ensuring that pupils recall and practise their phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) knowledge regularly. As with key stage 2, staff have strong subject knowledge and make sure that pupils pronounce, and blend, sounds correctly when they decode words. As a result, Year 1 pupils' attainment in the phonics screening check has risen since the time of the previous inspection. In 2018, it was above the national average for the first time.
- Teachers also make sure that pupils apply their phonics knowledge to spell words accurately when they are writing in English and other subjects. This has contributed to improvements in the quality of pupils' writing in key stage 1. In the 2018 key stage 1 writing assessments, Year 2 pupils attained standards broadly similar to other schools nationally.
- You and your team are determined to strengthen the teaching of early reading. With this aim, you have recently invested in a new programme for the teaching of phonics, including training for all teachers and teaching assistants. While at an early stage, this approach is enabling leaders and staff to tailor teaching precisely to pupils' needs and identify how best to support pupils who have fallen behind. However, lower-attaining pupils' reading books sometimes contain letter-sound correspondences that pupils do not know securely or have not been taught. These pupils, therefore, find it difficult to read words accurately or confidently. Instead, pupils guess what the words say or look at pictures to help them.
- The final area I considered was the school's work to support pupils' personal development. This remains a whole-school priority, particularly with regard to raising pupils' self-esteem and resilience.

- The provision for pupils' emotional well-being is a strength. Staff are well trained in mental health issues and are quick to identify pupils who need extra help. Through the school's 'mental health hub', these pupils receive personalised programmes of support which successfully increase their ability to manage emotions and cope with adversity.
- Pupils are overwhelmingly positive about the pastoral care they receive and how 'staff always think of ways to boost our confidence'. One pupil, summing up the views of many, said: 'This school encourages us to talk about what we feel and why. This helps me to feel better and safe.' You and your team continually seek ways to make sure this high-quality pastoral care is sustainable. For example, you have put in place further training to increase the number of staff who have the necessary expertise to act as pupil mentors.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils at the early stages of learning to read develop their accuracy and fluency by reading books that match the sounds they know
- when reading for pleasure, confident readers are encouraged to read a breadth of books and authors, including those with more demanding vocabulary and content.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Murphy-Dutton  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, your deputy headteacher and middle leaders. I also met with groups of staff, including those with specific responsibility for pupils' pastoral care. The 31 responses to Ofsted's staff survey were reviewed. I listened to pupils from Year 1, Year 2 and Year 6 read, and met with members of the school council. I also took into account the 80 responses to Ofsted's survey for pupils. We visited classrooms together and I looked at samples of pupils' work. I met with members of the governing body and an adviser from the local authority. A range of documentation was reviewed, including the school's self-evaluation, safeguarding records and pre-employment checks on staff. The views of parents were taken into consideration through the 163 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including written comments.