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Miss Jane Linch
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Dear Miss Linch

Short inspection of Rickmansworth Park Junior Mixed and Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 4 October 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

You and your experienced staff have continued to work effectively to improve the educational provision. Everyone is passionate about the school and the quality of education that pupils receive. As well as this, you have worked effectively to improve the quality of the personal and social development of the pupils. This includes ensuring that pupils are aware of their rights and responsibilities. Adults work hard to ensure that pupils are nurtured and cared for. Pupils say that their teachers make learning fun. They speak highly of the range of extra-curricular events that they can take advantage of, including playing musical instruments and team sports. They also enjoy the responsibilities that they can undertake in Year 6, such as being digital leaders, play leaders, reading buddies or part of the kitchen clearing-up team. One pupil summed this up as, 'Our teachers turn basic things into interesting things'. Pupils are proud of their school. They behave well and treat each other with care and respect. Behaviour and relationships are positive because rules and expectations are clear, including on the playground. Children are supported with clear structures and routines that enable them to feel confident, secure and encouraged.

You have an experienced and skilled leadership team, whose members support you well in your commitment to continued improvement. They are proud to work at Rickmansworth Park and feel trusted and supported as professionals. The team includes a lead practitioner who is supporting other staff in improving the quality of

teaching and learning. Teaching is mainly strong because you have focused time and resources on sharing good practice in some aspects, particularly in the teaching of English. As a result, pupils are making strong progress in this subject. This is particularly true of the small number of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. This is also because expectations of all pupils are high. While appropriate support is provided, pupils are encouraged to be independent. Pupils receive feedback that helps them improve further. However, the teaching of mathematics is not as consistently effective as in other subjects. For example, some pupils make basic errors in number formation which are repeated and not corrected quickly.

One parent took time during the inspection to share her experience of the commitment and time given to her child to help her succeed. She was delighted with the progress and confidence that she could see developing in her child. Other parents and carers shared similar views through Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

At the time of the previous inspection, pupils' behaviour and the quality of teaching were strengths of the school. The school has maintained these positive aspects. At the time of the previous inspection, challenge for pupils in their learning was highlighted as an area for development. Most pupils now receive appropriately challenging work, and the proportions of pupils attaining greater depth at the end of key stage 1 and the higher standards at the end of key stage 2 are increasing, particularly in reading and writing. However, presentation and handwriting were highlighted as areas for improvement. This remains the case. Leaders have not been as rigorous in ensuring improvements in this area. For example, pupils' books do not reflect the high expectations of joined-up handwriting that leaders expect.

The curriculum is broad and balanced, and leaders ensure that pupils learn about other cultures both through stories and through visits and visitors. The curriculum contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The quality of work in pupils' books, which was an area of improvement from the previous inspection, is not consistently high in all subjects. Leaders are knowledgeable about the individual subjects that they lead and monitor work to ensure that pupils are making good progress. However, not all leaders are clear about what happens when pupils are not making good progress in subjects other than English and mathematics. Work in pupils' books is not consistently well presented and the celebration of the wide curriculum offered is not always evident.

Areas still to be tackled include pupils' handwriting and presentation skills. Mathematics teaching and outcomes, which are a priority, do not feature highly in school improvement planning or governor discussions.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have made the leadership of safeguarding a priority and have been rigorous in reviewing systems and practices. As a result, staff and pupils have good awareness

of how to make the school a safe place to learn. This is because information and training provided for staff and volunteers enable them to identify and report concerns to the correct person. The family support worker enables swift early help for families in need. The school works well with other agencies to ensure that families receive appropriate resources when needed. The effective communication systems in the school result in the correct people having the information they need to keep pupils safe and supported.

You have commissioned external support to further improve safeguarding approaches in the school. This collaborative work has provided support for leaders in tightening a range of practices, including staff training. The single central register, which records pre-employment checks for staff, is thorough. It now includes training records for every member of staff. This helps with the planning of training for all staff and volunteers. Pupils are clear about how to stay safe on the internet and are confident that they can tell adults when they are worried about anything related to their use of it.

Inspection findings

- Attendance has been lower than average and persistent absence has been above average in recent years. School leaders have now developed an effective and rigorous strategy for tackling unauthorised absence. This has resulted in improvements to overall attendance. Leaders have also focused on rewarding the large number of pupils who have continued good attendance. This is motivating pupils and parents to see the importance of regular school attendance and its positive impact on pupils' progress. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils, while improving, remains low and continues to be a focus for the school.
- Pupils' outcomes in reading across the school are high and have been for some time. School staff promote good reading habits and reading is taught well.
- The school has worked effectively to improve outcomes in writing at the end of key stage 1, which, for some time, were below average. In 2017 and 2018, pupils achieved highly and increasing numbers were reaching greater depth.
- Outcomes in the Year 1 phonics check, although above average, had been in decline. This improved significantly in 2018. The teaching of phonics is well structured and highly effective in supporting pupils to learn the basic skills of reading. Teachers and support staff are well trained and knowledgeable. This results in effective teaching and high levels of support. As a result, pupils make strong progress and are attaining well.
- Although pupils generally achieve well in mathematics, outcomes have lagged behind those in reading. This is because leaders have not prioritised the consistency of mathematics teaching across the school. Some mathematics teaching in the school does not match up to the high standards of the best. For example, some learning environments promote mathematical knowledge well and others do not. While changes have been made, and new resources are being introduced, the rate of improvement is too slow. Pupils in key stage 2 do not make the same swift progress in mathematics as they do in English. This is because leaders have not acted quickly enough to improve teaching in

mathematics or share good practice. For example, there is no expectation that the focus on fluency in mathematics, which is having good impact in Year 6, is extended beyond this year group.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils improves to match that of other pupils
- the teaching of mathematics improves, so that it is as effective as the teaching of English
- pupils improve their handwriting and presentation in all subjects, so that they are the best they can be.

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

Yours sincerely

Debbie Rogan
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

We discussed the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, areas for further improvement and information about current pupils' attainment and progress with the mathematics and phonics leaders. I visited lessons with you and held meetings with you and your senior leaders. I also spoke to pupils informally and I met with two governors. Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, along with attendance information and a discussion with the person responsible for maintaining the single central register.

I held discussions with the leaders for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and the pupil premium. I gathered a range of evidence to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included joint learning walks with you and your leaders. I looked at a range of pupils' work from across the school, both in books and on display, which included work from a range of subjects and pupil abilities. The 58 views of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were considered, as well as 36 responses that parents made using the free-text service. No pupils responded to the pupil survey. The views of 16 members of staff were also taken into account.