

7 February 2019

Mr Dominic Brown
Headteacher
Ramshaw Primary School
Oaks Bank
Evenwood
Bishop Auckland
County Durham
DL14 9SD

Dear Mr Brown

Short inspection of Ramshaw Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 2019, 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 February 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Senior and middle leaders have used their expertise to good effect to lead improvements in the priority areas which were identified in the previous inspection.

You are passionate about broadening pupils' horizons and raising their aspirations. To this end, teaching staff plan valuable learning experiences, including educational visits and events run by specialist visitors to the school. You and your leadership team have been successful in selecting topics and themes for learning which spark pupils' desire to learn. As a result, pupils show positive attitudes to learning and have a strong work ethic.

You and your staff team have detailed knowledge of each individual pupils' outcomes and needs. You use this to identify pupils for adapted or additional teaching, which is tailored to strengthen their progress. Teaching staff are adept in gauging the difference they have made to these selected individual pupils and reflecting on how they can maximise their impact.

Governors are committed to the school and they know the community well. Since the last inspection, the membership of the governing body has changed considerably. Governors demonstrate a clear understanding of the priorities for improvement and of their responsibilities. Governors have had training in appropriate areas which has extended their knowledge and expertise. As a result,

they are beginning to contribute to the strategic direction of the school. You provide governors with detailed information in relation to the key areas of the school's work, including analyses of pupils' outcomes. Despite this, governors do not challenge senior leaders effectively with regards to pupils' outcomes.

Safeguarding is effective.

Parents, carers, pupils and staff who shared their views during the inspection agreed that the school is a safe, nurturing place for pupils. Members of staff have built strong relationships with pupils and so pupils feel well cared for. You prioritise pupils' well-being and ensure that their emotional needs are catered for effectively. Your focus on developing pupils' understanding of equalities and diversity has resulted in an inclusive, welcoming ethos in the school, which enables pupils to thrive.

Staff understand their responsibilities in keeping children safe. Members of staff with a designated safeguarding role maintain detailed records of their work. They are swift in communicating with external agencies where necessary. Pupils know how to stay safe in a range of contexts, including when online.

Since the last inspection, you and your leadership team have been successful in reducing pupils' absence rates. There are clear systems in place to track pupils' attendance. You tackle absences rigorously and intervene as soon as pupils' attendance rates start to fall. You work closely with parents to provide support and advice where needed. Although you have increased attendance so that it is close to the national average, your continued work in this area will be important in building on this improvement.

Inspection findings

- At the previous inspection, you were asked to improve the teaching of phonics. You have since introduced a new approach to this aspect of teaching and learning which results in pupils developing their early reading skills well. Following the professional development of teaching staff, they now demonstrate strong phonics knowledge. In adult-led sessions, pupils have suitable opportunities to hear and practise the sounds they are learning, including through decoding words and sentences. From Reception Year onwards, teachers consolidate and extend pupils' learning by asking them to write and spell words containing specific sounds. The books pupils use to practise their reading are now well matched to the sounds they know.
- In phonics lessons, pupils, including the most able, usually receive activities which challenge them sufficiently. For example, pupils are stretched through tasks which require them to explore different spellings of the same sound. You and your senior leaders have also focused on promoting regular reading at home through inviting parents to events, such as 'relax and read', a phonics party and 'stay and play'. As a result of this improved practice, pupils, including lower-attaining pupils, decode unfamiliar words confidently and accurately. Pupils of all abilities now develop their fluency in reading well.

- Your work to improve pupils' writing outcomes has brought about considerable success. Pupils now have regular handwriting lessons, with opportunities to practise forming letters and joining them together. In addition, teachers now have suitably high expectations of pupils' presentation of their work. Consequently, pupils develop neat handwriting and they take pride in their work.
- You and your team of leaders have identified that, to strengthen pupils' progress in writing, their skills in speaking, listening and reading must also be developed. As such, pupils have valuable opportunities to discuss and debate pertinent issues. Younger pupils' speaking skills are fostered through an emphasis on learning nursery rhymes, participating in role play and speaking homework activities.
- Pupils' learning in English now starts with a high-quality text or book which is linked to their current topic, for example the Second World War or volcanoes. Pupils find their topics inspiring and they show high levels of motivation to read and write about them. Similarly, teachers have introduced a real-life purpose for each piece of writing which adds to pupils' enthusiasm and stamina for writing at length. For example, pupils appreciated the opportunity to write to the Prime Minister to express their views on a current issue.
- Pupils, particularly those in upper key stage 2, understand the value of broadening their vocabulary. They actively collect new words through their reading and discussions, which they then use in their writing. The revised approach to teaching writing has been effective in supporting pupils' stronger progress in writing. As a result of the strategies you have introduced, pupils' writing books show evidence of good progress in paragraphing, sentence construction and their use of ambitious vocabulary.
- Pupils have opportunities to apply their English grammar, punctuation and spelling skills by writing extended pieces in a range of subjects, such as geography, history and science. However, these opportunities are not frequent enough in some year groups. Additionally, teachers do not have consistently high expectations of pupils' writing skills outside English lessons. This means that some pupils make and repeat errors in their writing and their progress is not maximised.
- The last inspection report also asked leaders to raise teachers' expectations of what the most able pupils can achieve. You have focused particularly on raising the level of challenge for the most able pupils in mathematics. The professional development of teaching staff has ensured that pupils now have opportunities for explaining their reasoning and solving real-life problems. However, the most able pupils in key stage 1 do not always move on to complex activities as quickly as they could.
- The curriculum is well designed to ensure that pupils, including the most able, think deeply in a range of subjects. Pupils are knowledgeable about the topics they study. Through opportunities for discussion and debate, pupils form and articulate their opinions on important issues well, such as those relating to politics and the environment. However, when pupils write about these topics, the support given to the most able pupils in key stage 1 sometimes restricts their independence.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers have high expectations of pupils' writing in all subjects and provide frequent opportunities for pupils to write at length in a range of subjects
- the most able pupils, particularly those in key stage 1, receive a suitable level of challenge in all subjects
- governors challenge leaders effectively with regard to pupils' outcomes.

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

Yours sincerely

Karine Hendley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, the chair and vice chair of governors and senior and middle leaders. I had a telephone conversation with a local authority representative. I observed teaching and learning with you and other leaders in all classes across the school. I scrutinised pupils' work alongside the deputy headteacher and listened to pupils read. I spoke to pupils, both formally and informally, and observed their behaviour around the school, including at breakfast club and playtime. I also took account of the nine responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. I met with parents at the start of the school day and took account of the 14 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 10 free-text responses. I reviewed school documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, as well as information about pupils' progress, attainment, behaviour and attendance. I spoke with staff during the inspection and considered the eight responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.