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Miss Lyn Corderoy
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Corderoy

Short inspection of Grange Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 March 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 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Grange Primary is a happy school where pupils enjoy learning about a wide range of subjects and topics. Developing a varied and interesting curriculum has been one of your key priorities over many years. I did not look at this area in any depth, but pupils were keen to tell me about their learning in school and the places they have visited.

Results of Ofsted's surveys show high levels of satisfaction with the school from pupils, parents and staff. Almost all of the parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, said that they would recommend the school to others. Three quarters of those parents also chose to leave a positive comment in support of the school, with many highlighting that their children are happy at school and that they feel their children are making good progress.

Leaders and governors have taken action to address the areas for improvement identified by the previous inspection. For example, leaders reviewed the way that handwriting is taught and expectations for how work should be presented. Leaders have also taken action to ensure that pupils are provided with sufficient challenge. However, these actions have not had sufficient impact in raising standards in reading, writing and mathematics across the school.

The school's published information on pupils' outcomes in the national tests indicates that pupils are not doing well enough during their time at the school. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in each of reading, writing and mathematics has been notably below the national average for the past three years. Although pupils make better progress in writing and mathematics than they do in reading, progress in these areas is still no better than average. This means that, if pupils have not made enough progress during key stage 1, they do not catch up quickly in key stage 2.

Governors are committed to the school and support it well. However, they do not hold you and the other leaders to account well enough. They accept the weaknesses in outcomes too readily and do not have high enough expectations for pupils. Governors have not considered that the weak outcomes could be the result of weaknesses in teaching. This means that they have not ensured that the leaders improve the quality of teaching, where this is necessary, so that outcomes improve to at least the national average, particularly in reading and phonics. The school's self-evaluation is overly generous because governors think that the school is better than it is.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. By the end of the inspection, the school's single central record of pre-appointment checks met legal requirements. Although there is room to strengthen systems further, overall, there is a sufficiently strong approach to ensuring that only suitable adults are allowed to work with pupils.

All parents who responded to Parent View said that they feel that their children are safe at school. Pupils also said that they feel safe and well cared for. The school has a kind and caring atmosphere. Pupils know that they can talk to any adults, if they are worried about something at school or at home, and they will be listened to. Pupils know that the staff are there to help and support them. Pupils feel safe from bullying. They say that it happens rarely and is always sorted out quickly by staff.

Inspection findings

- In order to check whether the school remains good, I looked closely at two areas, reading and attendance. I chose to look at reading because pupils' attainment and progress in reading have been below average for some time. Indeed, relative progress in key stage 2 has been significantly below the national average, and in the bottom 20% of schools, for the past three years.
- Leaders have taken a range of actions to improve outcomes in reading. Some of these are starting to make a difference, particularly in upper key stage 2. For example, leaders introduced a new approach to teaching reading comprehension so that pupils develop specific skills such as predicting, inferring and retrieving information from texts. This is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' progress. Pupils told me about the approach, confidently and in detail, and how it is helping them with their reading comprehension.

- I saw the approach demonstrated very successfully in a Year 6 class, where pupils were reading 'Wonder' by R J Palacio. Pupils read extremely fluently and showed great understanding of the text. They described to me how they regularly debate issues and use the text to back up the arguments they make. The positive impact on pupils' outcomes was very clear.
- However, although this high-quality teaching was clearly typical over time, this is not the case elsewhere in the school. Leaders have taken action to improve teachers' skills, such as providing coaching and teaching alongside colleagues, but this has been more successful in some cases than in others.
- The teaching of phonics shows a similarly mixed picture. Results of the Year 1 phonics screening check have been below the national average for the past four years, with no notable signs of improvement. In 2017, the proportion of children that left the early years having achieved the early learning goal in reading was just above the national average. The proportion of the same group of pupils that reached the expected standard in the phonics screening check, a year later, was below the national average. This lack of good progress after leaving the early years has also been the case for previous groups of pupils.
- The teaching of phonics is not consistently good. Some staff do not have the strong subject knowledge needed to teach this important area well enough. The school's chosen phonics scheme is not followed systematically enough.
- The negative impact of this is clear in the poor progress that some pupils are making. This is particularly true of pupils in Year 2 and beyond who did not reach the expected standard in Year 1. These pupils are not being given the skills they need to catch up quickly with learning to read.
- I chose to look at attendance, as my second key line of enquiry, because absence rates are above the national average. This has been the case every year since the previous inspection. The gap between the school's absence rate and the national average was much wider in 2018 than previously. Rates of persistent absence are also above average and were high in 2018.
- We discussed the absence of pupils with the poorest absence records. The school continues to support these pupils well. I was satisfied that, in many cases, there were clear and unavoidable reasons why individual pupils are persistently absent from school.
- Leaders are taking a range of appropriate actions to reduce absence generally and to tackle individual pupils' high rates of absence. For example, members of staff work closely with individual parents to support them to get their children to school daily and on time. This is having a positive impact for some pupils. However, there is still work to do to reduce absence so that it is at least in line with the national average, if not better.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- phonics teaching is systematic and consistently of good quality so that more

pupils make better progress

- attendance improves to at least the national average
- governors develop the skills and knowledge needed to better hold leaders to account.

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

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other leaders, a representative of the local authority and three governors. I observed teaching and learning, jointly with you, in five classes. I spoke with pupils during my visits to classrooms and met separately with a group of pupils in key stage 2. I took into account the 89 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and the 88 free-text comments that were received. I also took note of 32 responses to the staff survey and 97 responses to the pupil survey. I looked at a range of school documents including pupils' exercise books and the single central record of pre-appointment checks.