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Mrs Kate Garnett
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Dear Mrs Garnett

Short inspection of Tollesbury School

Following my visit to the school on 26 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 May 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

You lead an ambitious and determined team, supported effectively by governors and the local authority. You and senior leaders have a clear understanding of what the school does well and where improvements could be made. Good progress has been made on the areas for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection. Your team is taking decisive action to improve pupils' achievement and enhance their well-being.

The vast majority of parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's questionnaire, and who spoke to me have confidence in you and your staff. Most said their children are learning well and cared for in what one parent referred to as a 'thriving and caring environment'. Parents said staff are approachable and any issues raised have been dealt with quickly and to their satisfaction.

Teaching in the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2 has remained good.

Since the previous inspection, you and your leaders have improved the outcomes for pupils, including for the most able. Published information shows that the proportions of key stage 1 pupils achieving at least the standards expected for their age or who are working at greater depth are close to or above national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. Similarly, the proportions of key stage 2 pupils

achieving at least the expected or higher standards in reading and writing are close to or above national averages. You have recognised that key stage 2 pupils' achievement in mathematics has not been as strong. Effective action has been taken to address this.

You and your leaders have ensured that the standard of pupils' personal development and well-being has been maintained. Typically, pupils enjoy learning, listen attentively and participate fully in lessons. They try their best and behave well. Pupils are polite and courteous to adults and each other as they move around the school.

The 'daily mile', supervised by teaching assistants, is an initiative to get pupils to be active for 15 minutes a day. At the same time, pupils who need additional help are given extra time with the teacher to address any gaps in their knowledge and skills. This contributes effectively to pupils' learning.

Collaboration with the Blackwater and Tiptree partnerships is providing effective training for staff.

You have rightly identified that while your current curriculum is engaging and enriching pupils' learning experiences, you need to ensure that pupils make strong progress in all subjects and are looking at how the curriculum is taught in all classes. You are thinking carefully about ways to develop pupils' resilience so that they become even better learners.

Governors are very knowledgeable about the work of the school. They make regular checks that leaders' actions are improving outcomes for pupils. Governors ensure that systems are in place to safeguard pupils. However, they do not routinely check that the school's website meets the government's requirements for what should be published online.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose. You and your staff have established a strong safeguarding culture to reduce the risk of harm to pupils. Your effective systems and procedures ensure that confidential child protection information is recorded effectively. These records are thoroughly and meticulously maintained.

The single central record meets requirements. Checks to ensure the suitability of adults working at the school, including volunteers, are secure. Each term, governors verify that these systems are as they should be, and that they are well maintained.

Staff training is up to date and demonstrates that they understand how to keep pupils safe. Pupils feel safe. They told me that bullying rarely happens. Staff have ensured that pupils know who to tell if they have concerns. Pupils are confident that staff will deal with issues swiftly. As one put it, 'It gets sorted out quickly.'

Pupils have a thorough understanding of keeping safe online. They know not to play online games with strangers or to give out their personal details, and what to do if web content is upsetting.

While the vast majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire and who spoke to me were positive about the work of the school to keep pupils safe, a few expressed concerns about how it deals with incidents involving bullying. You and your leaders are planning ways in which issues can be addressed and parental concerns allayed.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of lines of enquiry. One of these involved looking at pupils' achievement in mathematics. Although published information shows an improving picture on the previous year, the progress of pupils who left the school at the end of Year 6 remained below average. Your leaders identified that pupils did not have sufficient opportunities to apply and develop their mathematical reasoning skills.
- To tackle this, leaders have introduced a new teaching approach called, 'SPACE' (scaffold, practice, apply, challenge, extend). This strategy ensures that teachers provide examples to support pupils' understanding of new mathematical ideas. It then provides ample opportunities to practise and apply new learning. Challenge is provided as well as opportunities to extend their knowledge and skills. When we visited classes and looked at pupils' books, I noted that pupils are regularly asked to 'prove it', for example, or explain their reasoning.
- Your leaders have ensured that staff are provided with effective training to help support the teaching of mathematics. Teachers show they have secure mathematical subject knowledge. They use technical language, practical resources, models and diagrams effectively in their explanations. In turn, this helps pupils to expand their vocabulary and explain their thinking. In Year 5, for example, pupils could explain accurately how to convert decimals to fractions.
- In addition to the increased emphasis on developing pupils' reasoning skills, the introduction of a recent computer technology initiative to strengthen pupils' recall of multiplication tables has been introduced. This is engaging pupils, helping to maintain their interest and leading to more rapid recall of multiplication and division facts. Pupil performance information shows that these new approaches are paying dividends. Pupils are making strong progress. A greater proportion are working at a greater depth.
- Next, I focused on how effectively you and your leaders have organised the curriculum to improve pupils' progress. You have a clear vision for the curriculum at Tollesbury. It is an area for improvement in your school development plan to move pupils' progress from average to above average.
- You and your leaders observe learning in lessons and look at pupils' books to check how well their improvement strategies are working in all classes. You and other leaders meet pupils for 'books and biscuits', to find out about their learning. This provides you with opportunities to look at the curriculum from the pupils'

point of view. So that you and your leaders can be sure that teachers' assessments of what pupils can do are accurate, you meet as a staff with staff from the Blackwater and Tiptree partnerships to discuss and compare pupils' work. You use this information to make further improvements. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do. Effective teaching is evident in pupils' books. They take pride in the presentation of their work.

- Pupils enjoy the broad range of activities across the curriculum. They enjoy learning. As one pupil put it, 'School is good for learning and having fun.' Pupils enjoy music, including communal singing. They enjoy sponsored events to raise money and decide for themselves which charity will benefit. They are particularly proud of raising funds for the Tollesbury First Responders and the Air Ambulance. Such activities contribute well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Pupils who met with me could enthusiastically recall facts from the topics they studied in the autumn term in 2018. However, evidence from pupils' learning journeys shows that their progress in history and geography is not as strong as it is in English and mathematics, particularly in Year 6. This means pupils are not as well prepared for the next stage in their education in these subjects.
- Finally, I wanted to know how well governors hold you and your leaders to account for the impact of your actions to improve the school. Notes of monthly meetings show that governors robustly challenge leaders at all levels and follow up rigorously on any outstanding issues. Governors support staff effectively by reviewing safeguarding practices to ensure they are robust.
- Governors know the school's strengths and its areas for development. They work together with staff to check how well improvement strategies are working. Governors scrutinise pupils' performance information to make sure pupils are achieving well.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the revised curriculum means that pupils will be as prepared in the foundation subjects for the next stage in their education as they are in reading, writing and mathematics, particularly in Year 6
- the school's website meets the government's requirements for what maintained schools should publish online.

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

Sarah Warboys
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held discussions with you and your senior leadership team about the progress made since the previous inspection and to gather information on my key lines of enquiry. I noted your evaluation of the quality of education, plans for improvement and information about how well pupils currently in the school are achieving.

I met with you and the deputy headteacher as the school's designated leaders for safeguarding to review child protection procedures. I discussed with you your plans for reviewing the curriculum.

I joined you and the deputy headteacher in visiting all classes, with a focus on the quality of teaching and learning of mathematics.

I spoke to four governors, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. I held a conversation with a representative from the local authority.

I observed and talked to pupils at play during breaktime and made a brief visit to singing practice. I met with a group of pupils from Years 3 to 6 to talk about their learning and other experiences at school.

I took account of the 68 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 30 free-text responses from parents and talked to them as they brought their children to school.