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Ms Sarah Bowmer  
Headteacher  
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Dear Ms Bowmer

### **Short inspection of Comber Grove School**

Following my visit to the school on 2 April 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 2015.

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

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

You took up the post of substantive headteacher in April 2017. Two new deputy headteachers joined the school in September 2018. You work well with the local authority to help you come to an honest and accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for development. Leaders are proud of the diversity and inclusive nature of the school. For example, overall, pupils speak 36 different languages and their heritage represents 28 different countries.

You celebrate the school's successes in the performing arts and physical education. You are particularly proud of your work with a local theatre company to help improve the curriculum. In November 2018, Year 3 pupils put on a performance called 'The Stone Age', about a group of children travelling back in time. This project is an effective example of the school's work to help develop pupils' self-esteem, confidence and dramatic skills.

Leaders have successfully addressed the areas for improvement since the previous inspection. The school has been particularly successful in reducing the level of persistent absence. This is, in part, due to celebrating pupils' attendance and improved support for parents and carers. Pupils' attainment, by the end of key stage 2, improved in 2018. They attain as well as other pupils nationally, in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' progress in mathematics was significantly above the national average and disadvantaged pupils made progress in line with other pupils, nationally.

Governors have a good understanding of the school. They visit the school and participate in reviewing the school's work. This has helped governors to check improvements and engage in dialogue with leaders and staff. Governors are not complacent, they have a clear view on what the school needs to do better. They hold leaders to account effectively.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding requirements are fit for purpose. Leaders understand the risks that could affect pupils and their families within the local and national community. This includes, for example, knowing about the dangers associated with knife crime, gang affiliation and the internet. Leaders work effectively with external agencies to provide education and support for pupils, when needed. Leaders and staff know pupils and their families well. Staff are trained on safeguarding. For example, they talk confidently about the potential signs and symptoms in relation to female genital mutilation and gang affiliation.

A few pupils and parents expressed a concern that some pupils are mean to each other or engage in bullying. Pupils say that leaders take action to deal with such incidents and school records show that bullying is rare. Most pupils who spoke with me, and those who completed Ofsted's questionnaire, say that they feel safe in school. They give clear examples of what they have learned about how to stay safe, including when online. Pupils also say that adults help them when they need it. A high proportion of pupils who completed the questionnaire strongly agreed that the school encourages them to respect people from other backgrounds and to treat others equally.

Leaders keep effective records of any safeguarding concerns and their responses, including any incidents of bullying, racist or homophobic comments. Leaders prepare a regular behaviour report, which they use to identify and action any trends or issues that arise. For example, leaders hold assemblies, organise activities and use literature to help pupils reflect on the impact of their words and actions on other people. The number of replies to Parent View, Ofsted's questionnaire for parents and carers, was low. The school's survey from this school year suggests that a high proportion of parents say that their child is safe at school. This is supported by the parents that I spoke to during the inspection.

### **Inspection findings**

- We agreed that one key line of enquiry for the inspection would be to evaluate the school's work to improve boys' reading and writing skills. We noted that more boys achieve a good level of development by the end of the early years, compared to girls. Additionally, your evaluation identifies differences in reading and writing outcomes between boys and girls across key stages 1 and 2.
- Leaders have prioritised improving boys' reading and writing skills. Leaders have chosen a writing scheme that helps boys to engage in writing. Leaders also introduced 'writing outcomes' books across the school from September 2018. The focus is to support pupils, including boys, to produce their best pieces of written work. Boys told me that there is much more focus on their writing than last year. They say that they write a lot more during the school day.

- A review of the 'writing outcomes' books, and other written work, suggests that boys' writing is improving. Their stamina to write fluently is developing well. Although they have opportunities to write in other subjects, such as humanities and science, the quality of their writing (and for girls) is not as detailed.
- There is consistency in the way teachers use the school's 'we are learning to' (WALT) approach to teach and assess pupils' writing. However, in some of the work we reviewed, the quality and accuracy of pupils' writing in relation to their spelling and grammar was not routinely of high quality.
- The second key line of enquiry was to look at standards at key stage 1. This is because, in 2017, pupils' attainment was high across reading, writing and mathematics. However, in 2018, attainment in writing and mathematics declined sharply.
- There have been several improvements made to the curriculum at key stage 1. For example, leaders identified that pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics was an area for improvement. A revised curriculum has been put in place, trialled first with Year 3, which is helping them to catch up with gaps in their learning from last year. A review of pupils' work has shown that the content that pupils learn is more challenging. This is helping to improve pupils' mathematical knowledge. The school's assessment information, supported by the reviews of work, suggests that differences between the progress of boys and girls are reducing.
- The teaching of phonics (early reading) is one of the school's priorities. There is a regular review of pupil groupings to ensure that pupils are given the right support to read and write. This starts in the early years and continues across key stage 1. Teachers and supporting adults are given effective training in phonics. They model sounds accurately. However, staff do not promote pupils' writing as effectively as they could, such as modelling, checking and correcting pupil's letter formation and spelling. Some of the lower-ability boys that I heard read were not routinely confident to apply their phonics skills to decode words.
- Lastly, we agreed to look at the impact of the new leadership structure in securing school improvement. This is because it is almost an entirely new senior and middle leadership team, since the previous inspection.
- Many subject and phase leaders (middle leaders) are new to their roles. They understand their priorities and responsibilities. These are highlighted effectively in their improvement plans and the reports they prepare for senior leaders. Middle leaders appreciate the regular dialogue and meetings they have with their line managers.
- Leaders at all levels work well as a team. Senior leaders and governors have identified the need to further develop the knowledge and skills of middle leaders. There is still more to do to help them to deliver and sustain high-quality learning within their areas of responsibility.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- improve the quality and accuracy of pupils' writing across the curriculum, particularly for boys

- extend middle leaders' knowledge and skills to enable them to lead high-quality school improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Sam Hainey  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection I held meetings with you, senior leaders, governors, subject and phase leaders. I met with a representative of Southwark local authority. We visited lessons in different year groups across the school and looked at a range of pupils' work. I met with a group of boys to discuss and review their writing. I also listened to a group of boys reading. I spoke to pupils of different ages, informally and formally during the inspection. I looked at a range of documents, including those related to safeguarding. I considered the three responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, 49 replies to Ofsted's pupil survey and the small number of responses to the staff survey. I also reviewed the school's recent survey of parents' views.