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14 June 2019

Mr Andrew Robertson
Headteacher
Stretham Community Primary School
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Dear Mr Robertson

Short inspection of Stretham Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 June 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 January 2016.

This school continues to be good.

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

You, school leaders and governors know the school very well. Your rigorous evaluation of its strengths and what can be even better means the school keeps improving. Staff fully support leaders' vision for a school where pupils excel at the heart of their community. Parents are very positive about the school as an exciting place where their children enjoy learning. This was evident both from those who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire, Parent View, and from those who spoke to me in the playground. Speaking for many, a parent said, 'My child loves going to school and is excited about learning.'

The school works closely with a local cluster of schools to share best practice and to gain external validation of its work, for example in writing. It is also involved in a wide-ranging project to improve pupils' vocabulary. This is having a positive impact on how pupils express themselves verbally and in writing. A particular strength of the school is the use of outdoor learning. Pupils benefit from regular use of the school's learner pool, enabling almost all of them to be able to swim 25m by the end of Year 6. Leaders have recently installed adventure play equipment that pupils enjoy climbing over. The school's wildlife exploration area teaches pupils a wide variety of skills and promotes their appreciation of the natural world.

Children in the early years are stimulated by a range of play equipment outside including crates, tyres and drainpipes. All this outdoor activity helps to keep children and pupils fit and promotes their well-being.

Pupils are polite and friendly and get on well together. They say they feel safe in school and that bullying is not an issue. They are keen to learn and showed me their work with pride. In classrooms there is a purposeful buzz as pupils concentrate on their studies. The learning environment in school is very attractive, with displays celebrating children's work, and a skilfully produced historical timeline running the length of the main corridor. The school promotes British values effectively, embracing diversity and ensuring that pupils respect those who are different in any way.

Teaching is consistently strong. Teachers have high expectations and probe pupils' knowledge and understanding with careful questioning. They encourage pupils to persevere with their work and to do their best. In general, they make sure that work is suitably challenging, although in some subjects the learning of the most able pupils is at times not sufficiently extended. Specialist teaching in sport, modern foreign languages and computing is effective.

Pupils are well prepared for secondary school. Over three years, the proportions of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined have been above the national average. Almost all pupils make good progress from their starting points. Books in a range of subjects show how pupils are building knowledge and skills over time. Year 6 pupils could explain in some depth what they had learned about the Chinese Shang Dynasty and the Terracotta Army.

Governors have reflected on their roles and sought advice from a national leader of governance to make their meetings more efficient. They play a strong strategic role in bringing about improvement. They are active in supporting and promoting the school. Through focused visits they check progress against key priorities on the school development plan, such as investigations in science. In this way they have tackled the issues identified at the time of the previous inspection.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have established a culture of safeguarding, ensuring that pupils feel safe and well protected. Leaders keep careful records of any incidents and work closely with other agencies. They are persistent in holding these agencies to account. All necessary checks take place to ensure that members of staff are suitable to work with pupils. Staff receive regular training in line with government requirements. This has included updates on the 'Prevent' duty to combat extremism and radicalisation. Pupils know about e-safety and how to avoid risks linked with using the internet.

Inspection findings

- In order to make sure the school remains good, I identified a number of key lines of enquiry that we agreed at our initial meeting. First of all, I considered what leaders are doing to ensure that all disadvantaged pupils make the progress they should. This was because at key stage 1 in 2018 the progress of disadvantaged pupils was not as strong as that of the other pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. None reached greater depth.
- The school provides well for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders know them well as individuals and give them personalised action plans. Consequently, pupils make good progress and differences are diminishing between disadvantaged pupils and the others in the school. You, as the pupil premium champion, seek pupils' views about their interests and how their learning can improve. You ensure that the pupil premium is spent wisely in supporting them in keeping up with other pupils. Where progress is not so strong, as in Year 2 last year, this is because pupils have recently joined the school or because they have special educational needs and very low starting points. The progress of the small number of disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 last year was very strong compared with other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Next, I considered what you are doing to raise standards in writing. Writing was an area to improve at the previous inspection. Attainment in writing at the end of key stage 2 in 2018 was not as strong as it was in reading and mathematics, where it was above the national average. The proportion of pupils reaching greater depth in writing was below the national average.
- The school has fully embraced a vocabulary initiative that is government funded. Staff have been trained and it is being implemented consistently across key stage 2. Impact is evident in improved writing in books and pupils' willingness to try out new words. Vocabulary is also displayed on classroom walls.
- The adoption of self-editing has made pupils more aware of their writing and how they can improve it. Books show that this is having an impact in strengthening progress. Pupils in Years 5 and 6, for example, are writing with increased confidence and complexity. In one story designed to build tension, pupils wrote, 'Struggling, I crawled out of the abyss... my stomach churned with dread.'
- You have identified as a next step extending this vocabulary initiative to the early years and key stage 1 so that all children and pupils benefit from learning new words systematically.
- Finally, we considered what leaders and governors are doing to ensure that the curriculum is rich and varied and enables pupils to apply their skills in meaningful ways. The curriculum has key assessment objectives and progression statements for each subject. It has been designed to meet the interests and needs of pupils, taking into account their aspirations and where they live.

- Leaders are enthusiastic and knowledgeable. There is evidence of more hands-on interventions in science. Books show that teachers take into account the starting points of pupils when planning activities. They incorporate cross-curricular links such as researching the Chinese alligator in science, linked to some work on China.
- The whole-school history project to mark the centenary of the end of the First World War was extensive and enabled pupils to gain a deep understanding of the impact of that war on families in the village. Through researching the names on the two war memorials pupils began to bring back to life the stories of men who had given their lives so long ago.
- When making choices about how to teach a subject area, sometimes teachers give the most able pupils, in particular, work that limits them in showing their depth of understanding or presenting their findings in creative ways. For example, they may be asked to cut out and stick pictures when they are capable of doing more.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the initiatives to widen pupils' vocabulary in their communication and writing at key stage 2 are extended to the early years and key stage 1
- the most able pupils extend their learning further in subjects other than English and mathematics through challenging activities that enable them to make choices in how they present their work.

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

Yours sincerely

Nick Butt
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other school leaders and the joint chairs of the governing body. I met with pupils, who shared their work with me and read to me. We visited all classrooms and looked at pupils' books. I examined a range of documents, policies and assessment information. I considered 66 responses from parents to Parent View, and 59 free-text responses. I spoke to parents in the playground before school.