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Mrs Anne Morten
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Morten

Short inspection of Ridgefield Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 November 2017, 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 March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You, and your leadership team, have worked with energy and reflection to ensure that teaching and learning continually improve and attainment for pupils continues to rise in line with the national average. Over the last three years, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception has been consistently above the national average. Consequently, children are well prepared to enter Year 1, where they make sustained and sometimes accelerated progress. In 2017, at the end of key stage 1, attainment for the pupils at Ridgefield Primary School was above average in reading, writing and mathematics.

Your vision of pupils being 'Brave Explorers, Great Thinkers' underpins everything you and your staff do. You are providing pupils with a diverse curriculum, which broadens their minds and helps them think critically beyond what is in front of them. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the many trips and visits they go on to enhance their learning and are animated when talking about their curriculum days. Leaders ensure that pupils develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding well. The provision for art is impressive. Your 'We are Ridgefield' project focuses pupils' learning on the community around them. This provides pupils not only with good subject knowledge, such as geographical and historical skills, but also with a strong sense of identity and connection to where they live.

You and the governors regularly review the school's improvement plan to identify

steps that need to be addressed as your school priorities. Staff receive comprehensive support and guidance to help them deliver the work required to achieve the improvements needed. For example, at the previous inspection, it was identified that pupils were unsure what they were learning and that they did not know how to improve their work. This is no longer the case. Together with your teachers, you have developed a feedback system with a focus on pupils' next steps. Pupils' books show that feedback is consistent across all the classes and that pupils are making good and, at times, rapid progress as a result. Likewise, in lessons, pupils explained confidently what they were learning about and how their learning linked to work they had already done.

You make effective use of a range of external agencies in your work to improve behaviour and, in turn, increase pupils' engagement in lessons. For example, by working with specialists in providing counselling and support, pupils are helped to develop self-control, understand their emotional responses and learn better coping strategies when they feel overwhelmed. We visited every class in the school and saw consistently high standards of behaviour and attitudes to learning. This was the case from the very youngest children, encouraging and clapping each other's successes in a mathematics game, to the oldest pupils' keenness and pride in sharing their work by reading their writing aloud at the end of the lesson. In some instances, pupils do not attend as often as they should. You are fully aware of the need to review constantly your approaches to promoting positive attendance in order to reduce the persistent absence of the most vulnerable pupils and increase attendance overall.

It is a sign of your strong leadership that staff are very motivated to improve their practice. You and your leaders' careful work to analyse the areas where pupils could do even better has led to immediate changes in the delivery of reading and writing in Year 1. These changes were only implemented in the spring term of 2017 but led to a marked improvement in the proportion of pupils entering Year 2 in September with the reading and writing skills expected for their age. However, you know that the progress of some pupils, in particular middle prior-attaining pupils and disadvantaged pupils, could be better, and have rightly identified this as an area for improvement.

You have also enhanced the role that middle leaders take in ensuring that teaching and learning standards are of a high quality across the curriculum. Subject leaders have more ownership of the tracking of pupils' progress and attainment in their subjects. They are taking on increasing responsibility to monitor pupils' work and observe teaching and learning. Some subjects leaders are in the early stages of this work and acknowledge further developments are required.

Safeguarding is effective.

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders, including governors, have created a caring ethos in which pupils feel safe and valued. Staff are fully committed to ensuring pupils' safety at all times. They

are aware of potential risks and know how to report concerns, stating 'nothing is too small to notice' and that leaders 'always take our concerns seriously'.

Leaders promote equality and tolerance exceptionally well. Staff ensure that pupils are equipped with age-appropriate knowledge and skills to keep themselves safe, including online, at school and when out in the community. All of the pupils who were spoken with, and those who answered the pupil survey, said they respect others. Pupils commented, 'Bullying doesn't really happen here but if it did, the adults would deal with it.' They are very aware of the school's behaviour system and understand how and why it would be applied.

Leaders work well with external agencies to provide timely and effective support to families. Referrals to social care are detailed and leaders are tenacious in their efforts to ensure that pupils receive the support they need. Pupils' safeguarding files are well organised and thorough.

Governors regularly visit the school and review the information to ensure that staff are safe to work with children. The electronic system used to collate this information has recently been reviewed and is detailed and comprehensive. Leaders have identified that personnel files require reorganising so that information can be found and cross referenced more quickly, providing a clear system to ensure that checks do not get overlooked.

Inspection findings

- To determine that the school remained good, my first key line of enquiry looked at how effectively leaders, including governors, spend and monitor the use of the pupil premium funding. In 2017, disadvantaged pupils achieved less well than other pupils in the school at both key stage 1 and key stage 2. You have already begun work to diminish this difference. Governors are diligent in tracking how the money is spent. Governors' minutes show how they challenge and question you about the quality of education. They rightly require evidence from you to assure themselves that what you are doing is making a difference.
- You have ensured that teachers are aware of the barriers to learning disadvantaged pupils may face. You also make sure that teachers and specialist trained support staff provide emotional support, alongside suitably challenging work, to improve pupils' performance. As a result, work in pupils' books and the school's assessment information demonstrate that in key stage 1 and the early years these pupils are already doing better. You agree that disadvantaged pupils in the current Year 6 cohort are not improving as quickly and that more precise tracking is needed to ensure that they make the progress they should.
- Teachers' use of assessment information to ensure that teaching meets the needs of all pupils was identified as an area for improvement at the previous inspection. This is why it was my second key line of enquiry. Leaders and teachers have a wealth of knowledge about the attainment of pupils and how many are on track to reach and exceed age-related expectations. In reading, writing and mathematics, leaders hold regular meetings to track pupils' progress towards their end of year targets. Work in pupils' books shows how carefully

teachers plan learning activities that match pupils' needs and help most to make at least good progress in lessons and over time.

- You are aware that from their starting points, middle prior-attaining pupils, in particular boys and those in receipt of pupil premium funding, do not progress as well as they should from their starting points. Your school's self-evaluation accurately identifies the need to ensure that all teachers are consistently using evidence from lessons to identify where these pupils are at in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there.
- My final key line of enquiry looked at what leaders are doing to improve attendance and ensure that behaviour is well managed. This was because attendance for the last three academic years has been just below the national average. Persistent absence has been in the highest 10% nationally for pupils in receipt of free school meals.
- The vast majority of parents, who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the free-text service, agreed their children are happy and safe at school. Typical responses were 'brilliant school' and 'super leadership'. A few parents felt that boisterous behaviour was not always well managed. Pupils think that, occasionally, their learning can be disrupted by the poor behaviour of a few pupils. Across the school, during our observations of pupils in their lessons, we saw highly positive attitudes to learning. Pupils were focused, supportive of each other and working hard.
- Inspection evidence shows that leaders have a comprehensive behaviour system which pupils fully understand and talk articulately about. They know how good behaviour is rewarded and most are motivated to work hard and share their learning with others. Your evidence demonstrates how the work you are doing with individual pupils is helping significantly to reduce the number of fixed-term exclusions.
- The school community is made up of a high proportion of pupils from multi-ethnic backgrounds. You have worked effectively to engage parents who do not speak English as a first language to improve their children's attendance. For example, you use members of staff as interpreters and hold whole-school parent meetings in their home language. In particular, this has been successful in improving the attendance of pupils from the Polish community.
- You work tirelessly to track pupils' attendance and are relentless in your approach to ensuring that you work regularly with parents to see the importance of attendance. This has been successful in a number of cases, but you know that attendance for some of the most vulnerable pupils remains inconsistent and persistent absence for a small group of disadvantaged pupils is still too high.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they regularly review the strategies in place to promote attendance so that the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent continues to reduce and attendance overall improves to be at least in line with the national average

- teachers use pupils' progress information more precisely to identify emerging gaps in pupils' learning so they can be addressed quickly, in particular for disadvantaged pupils and middle prior-attaining boys.

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

Kerry Grubb-Moore
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, your senior leaders, the office manager, four governors, a representative from the local authority and a selection of subject leaders. I met formally with a group of pupils and talked informally to other pupils during our learning walk and at lunchtime. Together, you and I visited every classroom. Alongside your English and mathematics leaders, I reviewed a selection of pupils' books.

Throughout the inspection, I scrutinised a range of documents, including: attendance information; behaviour logs; child protection files; pupil progress and attainment data; the school's self-evaluation and development priorities; your pupil premium report; governors' minutes; and your monitoring of teaching and learning.

I considered the views of 28 pupil responses and seven staff responses to Ofsted's questionnaire. I also reviewed 65 responses from parents, 30 from the free-text service, 34 from 'Parent View', Ofsted's online survey, and one letter received on the day of the inspection.