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9 July 2018

Mr Andrew Douglas
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Douglas

Short inspection of Riverside Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 June 2018, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

You work closely with your two deputy headteachers, other leaders and teachers to provide a harmonious learning environment where each individual is nurtured and valued. There is a strong caring ethos in the school, demonstrated by the pupils' attitudes towards each other as well as by the positive school environment. For example, an uplifting saying greets pupils on a board every day. At the time of my visit pupils were encouraged to 'be the reason for someone's smile today'. Parents told me that there is a 'very strong bond with the community', that there are 'brilliant teachers' and that you are 'very approachable'.

You and your leaders understand the school well and are continually striving to improve. Teachers receive regular helpful training and development sessions in school and with other local schools. Staff regularly meet together in teams. This means that they are well supported and can swap ideas about improving provision. Communication between teachers is good. Pupils and their needs are at the heart of all meetings. As a result, all staff are well informed about how to cater for individual needs.

You have improved outcomes by regularly checking the quality of pupils' learning in lessons and in their books. Your leaders review their actions thoughtfully and amend plans accordingly to ensure continued improvement in teaching and learning. They have sharp insight into how to improve reading, writing and

mathematics, and a good understanding of how to implement strategies practically. This means that there is good capacity for the school to continue to improve. You strive to ensure that pupils receive the best experiences from their broad curriculum. For example, last year the school attained the Primary Science Quality Mark for your science provision. You are currently focusing on strengthening provision in art to also attain the Arts Quality Mark.

Governors are passionate about the pupils' education and are highly ambitious for the school. They know the school well and visit regularly to ensure that statutory duties are met and that you and your leaders address the school's priorities. Governors evaluate the impact of school improvement strategies thoroughly using a range of evidence, including, for example, commissioning external reports by education specialists. You, your leaders and governors acknowledge that there is still more work to do to ensure that boys' writing continues to improve and that all pupils have regular opportunities to deepen their understanding of texts.

Safeguarding is effective.

The focus on creating a happy environment where pupils are encouraged to be kind to one another and supportive means that bullying and unkind behaviour are rare. Pupils are confident that when they occur teachers will deal swiftly with any issues. This view is also echoed by those parents who responded to the online Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View. Parents wrote in the free-text comments that at the school 'friendships blossom' and that there is a 'community feel', where older pupils look after the younger pupils.

All staff have a healthy attitude to risk, which is preparing pupils to understand how to stay safe. For example, children in Reception are encouraged to use the resources in the outdoor area independently, such as playing with sand and the toy equipment. However, the children know that they cannot climb on the tyre climbing frame without supervision. Pupils speak confidently about staying safe online, including when they participate in public online games.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders regularly review the quality of safeguarding arrangements, involving the safeguarding governor as appropriate. Reports and actions are monitored by the full governing body. Staff training is up to date and members of staff fully understand their responsibilities for ensuring that pupils remain safe.

Inspection findings

- In 2017 and 2016, pupils' progress in reading at the end of Year 6 was average. This is not the case currently. The school's performance information indicates that current Year 6 pupils are on track to make better progress this year.
- Leaders and teachers have focused upon ensuring that pupils read widely and often. The learning environment is literacy-rich. A number of displays celebrate reading. Pupils have access to a variety of modern texts via the library and their classroom book boxes. All pupils are required to read daily in school and at

home. Pupils told me that they appreciate the extra silent reading time and the opportunity to read a text as a class. The challenge of reading 100 books from a recommended book list has switched reluctant readers on to reading. For example, one boy spoke of how he had never finished a book before reading one of the authors on the list. He likes the books so much he now wants to read more from the same author.

- Teachers have reviewed the way they teach reading and are now asking more thoughtful questions regarding texts so that pupils are encouraged to give longer, detailed answers. Helpful grids support pupils to infer and deduce meaning and these are consistently used by teachers in upper key stage 2 classes. For example, in a combined Year 5 and Year 6 class, pupils were asked to scrutinise a difficult passage for ambiguous meaning and to discuss how the language manipulated your emotions. This generated some in-depth responses.
- Pupils in lower key stage 2 classes are not guided as specifically. A scrutiny of Year 3 and Year 4 books showed that questions to help pupils decode and interrogate texts are not as specific. As a result, this leads to more superficial responses that focus mainly upon the 'surface meaning' of texts.
- Pupils' progress improved in writing in 2017. However, boys made less progress than girls and the gap was wide. In 2017, the gap between boys' progress in writing compared to girls' progress in the school was wide. Leaders and teachers have been focusing on improving boys' writing in particular.
- Teachers have explored various ways of engaging boys in writing. The use of a writing wall is having impact. Every pupil's assessment piece is now displayed on the wall so pupils can see their progress. Pupils are proud of their achievements and want to do well.
- High standards of writing are achieved in Reception. At the start of the year many pupils learn to write their name. Nine months later they can write a full page and use full stops correctly. This high standard is continued through key stage 1, where pupils cultivate a love for writing. A boy from Year 1 commented that writing was the best part of the day.
- High expectations of vocabulary lead to sophisticated sentences being used. For example, in a Year 2 class, a pupil's story was being used as an example to other pupils. The opening sentence read: 'On an oppressive summer's day, Willow was whisking refreshing lemonade.' Desks contained word lists to help pupils carry on the story, featuring challenging vocabulary such as 'whimsical'.
- Strong use of vocabulary is continued into Year 3. However, a scrutiny of books of the most able pupils shows that boys typically are developing their craft as a writer more slowly than the most able girls. This was also seen in Year 4 books, where boys are not writing at length regularly.
- A scrutiny of Year 5 books showed that boys in particular are regularly making errors with spelling, punctuation and grammar. Pupils do respond to their teacher's corrections and amend their work. However, a couple of weeks later they will make the same mistakes again. They also repeat their mistakes in other subjects such as religious education, where they are asked to write at greater length.
- In 2015, pupils' progress in mathematics was in the top 20% nationally. This was

not the case in 2017, when pupils at the end of Year 6 made average progress. Pupils performed better in Year 6 with the reasoning test than with the arithmetic test. As a result, teachers have been focused upon sharpening pupils' mental arithmetic. This can be seen in class, where pupils are regularly asked to perform mental calculations.

- The focus on increasing challenge for the most able mathematicians has also increased the numbers of pupils who are working at the higher standard. The school's performance information shows that the number of pupils working at the higher standard in Year 6 currently has doubled. Challenge is also evident in Year 3 books and in key stage 1. Year 2 pupils are regularly asked to solve complex word problems. Recent work shows Year 2 pupils being asked to find missing numbers in complex sums as well as with fractions.
- A scrutiny of Year 4 books showed that extension tasks and challenging questions are not consistently provided for the pupils in mathematics.
- In 2017 middle-ability pupils did not make as much progress as other pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. In particular, the small number of middle-ability disadvantaged pupils did not make the progress they should have. Leaders have since focused on engaging disadvantaged pupils in writing. For example, these pupils have recently benefitted from a workshop with actors to look at performing and then improving writing.
- Leaders have monitored carefully the performance of pupils who are working at expected levels. Regular discussions with teachers about individual needs mean that any issues can be addressed readily. Middle-ability pupils now sit in small groups in lessons so that more support can be given. Teachers are focused on cultivating higher expectations. They push pupils who work at expected levels to rise to the challenge of completing tasks that are suited to the higher standard. This is leading to improving outcomes, particularly in reading and mathematics. Middle-ability boys' writing remains a continuing focus for leaders and teachers.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers consistently teach pupils how to infer and deduce so their comprehension skills are sharper
- boys have regular opportunities to write at length and teachers make sure they learn from correcting their errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar
- teachers consistently challenge Year 4 pupils in their mathematics tasks.

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

Liz Smith
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and your deputy headteachers, leaders in charge of literacy, numeracy and assessment, and three members of the governing body, including the chair. I also spoke to parents and a representative of the local authority. I held discussions with a group of pupils in key stage 2 and key stage 1. I listened to six pupils read from a range of year groups (Year 2 to Year 6). I visited lessons in each phase of the school to look at the effect of your work to improve the quality of teaching. During lesson visits, I sampled pupils' books and talked to pupils about their learning and progress. I looked in detail at some pupils' work from across a range of subjects in order to evaluate the progress that pupils have made over time. I took account of the 59 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, 38 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey and 32 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, its policies and other information available on the school's website. I focused particularly on the progress of pupils currently in the school and the quality of leadership and management, including governance. I also looked closely at the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.