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22 February 2018

Miss Jane Pomfret
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Dear Miss Pomfret

Short inspection of Nazeing Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 8 February 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. After a period of change and uncertainty, which affected its effectiveness, the school is now good and improving once again.

There have been a number of leadership changes since the previous inspection. The school's long-standing headteacher retired in July 2016 and the well-established deputy took over as headteacher in September 2016. She resigned her post and left the school in December 2017.

You joined the school at the beginning of this term and have spent a matter of weeks in post. However, you are an experienced headteacher and you have already developed an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. You have very quickly established good working relationships with pupils, staff, governors and the local authority. You know that there is more to do, particularly around reading and attendance, but you have made a very positive start. You are ably assisted by the deputy headteacher who, although relatively new to her role, has worked at the school for many years and has a wealth of knowledge about its past development to contribute to your partnership.

Nazeing is a happy school that pupils enjoy attending. Leaders and governors have ensured that the school's welcoming atmosphere has been maintained even through periods of change. Pupils behave very well in their classrooms and show interest and enjoyment in their work. Relationships between staff and pupils are very

positive and this helps to ensure that pupils like coming to school, behave well and do their best.

Most parents are happy with the school. Of those that responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, a very large majority said that they would recommend the school to others. A small number of parents expressed concerns about the school, saying that changes of leadership in recent years have had an impact on the effectiveness of the school. Several parents commented positively that they can already see that 'the school has changed for the better' since you took over at the beginning of January, and that, 'Miss Pomfret fills me with confidence that my child will continue to be cared for and be safe and very well educated at Nazeing School.'

Leaders and governors have taken effective action to tackle the areas for improvement identified by the previous inspection, although there is still work to do. The previous inspection asked leaders to 'make more teaching outstanding and raise achievement, particularly for more-able pupils'. Some of the teaching in the school is now very strong and, where this is the case, pupils achieve very well. However, a small amount of teaching is less strong and outcomes are weaker accordingly.

The previous inspection also asked leaders to strengthen assessment in the Reception classes. The two classes now work much more closely together, comparing assessments and analysing data together. The deputy headteacher described assessment in the Reception Year as having 'come on in leaps and bounds'. The improvements in the early years are seen clearly in the rising trend in the proportion of children that achieve a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year.

Safeguarding is effective.

You very sensibly made safeguarding your top priority when you took up your post. Together with the deputy headteacher, you carried out an audit of the school's child protection files to ensure that they are complete and up to date. As a result, the files are of good quality and well maintained. You have a very good understanding of the role of designated safeguarding lead. School records show clearly that leaders take timely and appropriate action to protect children when necessary.

Pupils feel safe at school. Relationships between staff and pupils are strong and this helps to keep pupils safe. All parents who responded to Parent View said that they feel that their children are safe at school. Pupils have been taught about bullying and know that they should tell an adult if it happens to them or to someone else. They have been taught the acronym 'STOP' to help them remember that bullying is something that happens 'several times, on purpose'. Pupils say that bullying does not happen very often and that staff usually sort things out quickly when it does.

Inspection findings

- In order to check that the school remains good, I followed a number of lines of enquiry. Firstly, I looked at reading and considered whether pupils are making good progress in this vital area of learning. I chose to look at reading because pupils' progress in the subject has declined over the last three years and was particularly low in 2017.
- You and the deputy headteacher have examined the results of the 2017 key stage 2 national tests very closely. You were unable to find a clear or obvious reason why the attainment and progress of this group of pupils was as disappointing as it was. The school's own assessment information shows that current pupils are making at least expected progress in reading throughout the school.
- I listened to a number of pupils read, individually, in different year groups. For the most part, pupils read fluently and at a level appropriate to their age and stage of development. However, we agreed that some issues were apparent that prevent pupils from making more rapid progress. For example, in some cases, the books that pupils are given to read are too easy and do not provide sufficient challenge. In other cases, although pupils are able to read the words on the page fluently, their understanding is more limited.
- The second area that I checked during this inspection was whether phonics teaching is effective. I chose to look at this area because results of the Year 1 phonics screening check have fallen over the last three years, from above the national average in 2015 to just below it in 2017. This line of enquiry also linked well with the first.
- We agreed that there are some weaknesses in the teaching of phonics that need to be addressed. For some pupils, their ability to 'sound out' words limits their skill at reading unfamiliar words when they are faced with them. Some staff do not have sufficiently strong knowledge of phonics to enable them to teach the subject fully effectively or to help pupils to apply their knowledge when reading and spelling.
- Where pupils struggle to read unknown words, it is sometimes because phonics is not the primary strategy that they have been taught to use first and foremost. As a result, some pupils simply guess words based on their understanding of the context or pictures. Pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to practise blending sounds together, out loud, to form words. You are fully aware that action needs to be taken to improve some teachers' subject knowledge and effectiveness in this area.
- My third line of enquiry was to check whether the most able pupils do as well as they should, particularly in reading and mathematics. I chose to look at this area because results of the 2017 national tests showed a declining trend in these subjects for the most able pupils.
- A number of actions have been taken to improve outcomes for the most able pupils. For example, pupils are now routinely provided with work that challenges them and gives them the opportunity to deepen their thinking. This is working well and most-able pupils are now making better progress. The school has

recently chosen to teach the oldest pupils in groups according to their aptitude and ability in mathematics. It is too soon to see the impact of this but you feel that early indications are positive. However, overall, it is clear that the most able pupils are doing well and making good progress.

- The final area that I looked at was attendance. I chose to look at this area because published data showed that rates of absence have increased steadily over recent years. The data available prior to the inspection showed absence rates well above the national average.
- The school does a great deal to tackle absence and to promote good attendance. Absence is monitored very closely and prompt action is taken to address absence that appears to be unnecessary or persistent. The school works closely with the attendance officer from the local authority. Attendance is improving as a result of these actions, although it remains just below the national average.
- The vast majority of pupils attend school regularly and on time. Although there are particular reasons why a small number of pupils are persistently absent, holidays in term time are the biggest issue for the school. The school does not authorise such absences, and regularly issues fixed penalty notices, but this does not appear to be a deterrent for some.
- You have plans in place to improve attendance further. We talked about the importance of recognising and celebrating improvements in attendance, even when pupils' overall absence remains too high. We also talked about the importance of balancing 'carrot and stick' in terms of ensuring that there are more positive consequences for good or improving attendance as well as negative consequences for unnecessary or persistent absence.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that the:

- teaching of reading is strengthened, including phonics, so that more pupils make rapid progress
- overall rate of attendance is improved so that it is at least in line with the national average.

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

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher, other members of staff, two governors and a representative of the local authority. I met with a group of pupils and spoke with other pupils during the day. I took into account the 73 responses to Parent View and 68 free-text comments that were received. I took note of the 21 responses to the staff survey. I observed teaching and learning, jointly with you and the deputy headteacher, looked at pupils' exercise books and listened to pupils read. I looked at school documents including the single central record of pre-employment checks.