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Mrs Ruth Cornell
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Dear Mrs Cornell

Short inspection of King's Ford Infant School and Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 29 January 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 July 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You took up your post as headteacher in September 2017, and you have wasted no time identifying the strengths of the school and the areas that require further improvement. You have introduced several improvements since that time, but you have also taken great care to maintain the values that staff and governors hold dear, such as the well-established caring and supportive ethos. One parent stated that it was the 'best school they had been to' and the headteacher sets 'clear direction' with 'regular, helpful communication'. Many parents commented that the school is 'family-friendly' and several used the same phrase that their child 'had blossomed since being at the school'. Such experiences reflect the school's motto, 'where everyone matters and every day counts'.

Parents' and pupils' positive experience of school has been achieved through a thorough review of the vision and values for the school, and through careful policy-making and delivery. All staff and pupils understand the SCARF code, which promotes safety, care, achievement, resilience and friendship. The focus upon warm relationships of mutual respect creates a calm and purposeful atmosphere for learning. This is complemented by bright, colourful displays which celebrate pupils' contributions as well as their achievements. Pupils are confident for their age and are used to engaging with adults in conversation. They do not shy away from talking animatedly about their learning.

Pupils love learning mathematics and they love reading. Pupils told me that they would learn mathematics all morning if they were allowed to. Other pupils, who

were asked to read to me, were so engaged with their reading that they did not want to stop until they reached the next chapter in their book. The curriculum delivers exciting learning of different topics. A boy proudly told me what he had learned about bears and their habitats as well as their hibernation habits.

Pupils have less confidence in their writing. Governors know this and are giving leaders their full support to improve the teaching of writing further. For example, they have committed expenditure to enhance the support certain pupils receive when learning to write. Governors engage actively in their roles and visit the school regularly. They know the school well and evaluate the impact of school improvement strategies thoroughly, using a range of evidence, to help inform their opinions.

Safeguarding is effective.

Senior leaders pay careful attention to the well-being of those pupils about whom they have a safeguarding concern. They work very closely with pupils' parents and with a wide range of external agencies to ensure that pupils receive appropriate support. You and other senior leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that your safeguarding records are detailed and of high quality. This ensures that all of the leaders have a comprehensive understanding of the support that each pupil receives.

Teachers have a thorough understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities, and know the signs to look for when checking on the well-being of their pupils. They receive regular safeguarding training and updates, including on issues in the local area that may affect pupils' welfare. Teachers appreciate the regular staff briefings to learn of the latest practice. When teachers have a concern about a pupil, they are quick to pass this concern on to the senior leaders.

Pupils regularly learn how to be safe, including when online, when using playground equipment and when undertaking practical activities in lessons. Pupils spoken to were most enthusiastic about their friends, saying that they could always talk to their friends about any issues. They all said that if they had a concern they would talk to their teacher. Pupils are confident that adults will listen to them and help them to resolve their concern. Almost all parents who expressed an opinion said that staff care for their children well.

Inspection findings

- In the previous inspection middle leaders were not fully helping the school to raise pupils' achievement. This is no longer the case. You have made sure that middle leaders have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They regularly monitor the implementation of improvement strategies and share their findings with staff. From their findings they devise and deliver further action if needed. They also train other teachers so they can keep improving their practice.
- From having a sharper look at leadership practice, governors undertook an audit of their skills and evaluated their contribution to school improvement. As a result,

they are challenging with rigour and holding the school to account for its performance. Governors also regularly undergo training and read educational research so that they understand key issues as well as ask the right questions. For example, from reading research about assessing the impact of learning support assistants, governors have requested a review of the deployment of learning support staff in the school.

- Teachers have received training to help them plan more challenging activities, particularly for the most able pupils. They regularly give different tasks, resources or questions for pupils to extend their learning further. To ensure that no pupil feels uncomfortable with the level of difficulty or with their learning, classrooms have colourful monsters which pupils can label should they need further support. Leaders have also reviewed their curriculum content, ensuring that the more challenging skills are revisited and developed over time. However, as yet, not all most-able pupils secure the standard of greater depth. This is particularly the case with writing in key stage 1.
- Good standards of writing are achieved in Reception. At the start of the year many pupils learn to write their name. The focus on strengthening motor skills and learning how to write sentences means that a number of children are able to spell tricky words correctly and can use full stops appropriately by the end of the academic year. In Year 1, pupils are able to write a page of writing and they are starting to use more interesting vocabulary. However, in some pupils' writing this is not sustained. Key vocabulary is not revisited several weeks later and so the pupil forgets to use the newly learned words. This is also the case in Year 2, where the most able writers are not able to consistently show a rich vocabulary and accurate use of punctuation and spelling.
- Leaders have worked tirelessly to improve attendance. Leaders and teachers closely check pupils' attendance, and are quick to take action when they identify any emerging patterns of absence. They are quick to provide support when this is the case. As a result, pupils' current attendance is in line with the national average. However, disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs (SEN) are typically the pupils who will regularly miss school. While pupil premium funding has been allocated to address this issue, the rates of persistent absenteeism have remained stubbornly high for this cohort of pupils.
- The new behaviour policy sets clear expectations for pupils and provides helpful guidance for staff. The 'firm but fair' approach and the explicit modelling of good behaviours is ensuring that pupils understand what is right and wrong as well as how to act in various environments. The use of a nurture sensory space is also providing pupils with the opportunity to reflect on their behaviour in a quiet, reassuring area. While a few parents expressed concern via Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, the behaviour of pupils with SEN is managed well.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers help pupils achieve greater depth in writing through reinforcing rich vocabulary and aiding pupils to consistently punctuate and spell accurately

- parents and pupils understand the importance of attending school regularly so that persistent absenteeism reduces, thus enabling pupils who are in danger of falling behind to catch up.

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 inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher in charge of English, the middle leaders in charge of early years provision and mathematics, the attendance officer and the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). I also met with the chair and vice-chair of governors. I spoke to parents and the local authority's school effectiveness advisor. I held discussions with two groups of pupils from Year 1 and Year 2. I listened to five pupils read from Year 1 and Year 2. I visited lessons in each phase of the school to look at the effect of your work to improve the quality of teaching. I was accompanied by you during these visits. I sampled pupils' books and spoke to them about their learning and progress. I observed assembly and breaktime. I took account of the 14 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, 13 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 29 responses to Ofsted's pupil 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.