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Mrs Sasha Furze
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Furze

Short inspection of Runwell Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 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 March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment as headteacher in September 2016, you have successfully reversed the decline in pupils' progress in reading and mathematics at key stage 2. You have strengthened leadership, strengthened teaching and assessment, developed strong teamwork in the school and restored staff morale. As a result, there is a strong culture for good teaching, learning and behaviour across the school. You have established strong links with parents, most of whom would recommend the school to others. One parent typically wrote, 'The new headteacher is excellent, communication is very good and I am very pleased with the improvements made in the school.'

You benefit from good support from school leaders and governors in moving the school forward. You have successfully addressed the area for improvement from the previous inspection to ensure that pupils make better progress in mathematics. You have strengthened provision in the early years and opened a new nursery, which is proving very popular with parents. One parent typically wrote, 'My daughter has developed a real love of learning in the six months she has attended the Nursery, as the facilities are great.' Pupils continue to do well at key stage 1 and all are making good progress from their different starting points in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils at key stage 2 are also making good progress in reading, writing English grammar, punctuation and spelling, mathematics and science, despite the dip in performance in reading and mathematics in 2017. Your self-evaluation is accurate and carefully linked to key priorities for improvement.

However, your self-evaluation does not link the impact of leadership on tackling the decline in the school's performance in 2017 and its subsequent rapid improvement in pupil outcomes from the beginning of last autumn term.

Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school continues to be good. Their parents, staff and pupils agree. Pupils enjoy coming to school, which is reflected in their good attendance. They have good attitudes to learning and want to do well. The curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well, including their understanding of fundamental British values. Pupils celebrate different cultural traditions; they learn about different world religions and visit various places of worship, such as the Neasden Mandir. Pupils take on responsibility as playground buddies, and older pupils look after younger pupils at breaktimes and lunchtimes.

Governors effectively hold the school to account for its work through regular visits and careful scrutiny of the reports they receive from school leaders. They regularly review data at their meetings and ask challenging questions about the progress that different groups of pupils are making. They ensure that the additional pupil premium and primary sport funding the school receives are used well to achieve value for money. Governors ensure that all legal requirements are met and all policies are up to date.

Safeguarding is effective.

You work closely with parents and external agencies to promote a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff and governors are implementing the school's policies and procedures to promote the well-being and safety of pupils effectively. As a result, pupils feel safe, and they move around the school and play safely in the playground. They have a good understanding of how to stay safe and handle equipment, including computers, safely. Staff ensure that children in the early years learn and play safely together so that the welfare requirements of the early years are met. High levels of staff engagement in children's activities in the early years ensure that they feel safe and happy in school.

Your procedures for checking the suitability of staff and visitors to work with pupils are thorough. Staff, pupils and most parents agreed that pupils feel safe and bullying is rare and dealt with effectively. All training in safeguarding is up to date.

Inspection findings

- To determine that the school remains good, I wanted to find out whether current pupils in Year 1 are now making good progress in phonics. This was because the proportion of pupils in Year 1 who met the expected standard in the phonics screening check fell from above average in 2016 to well below average in 2017. During the inspection, I heard eight pupils of different abilities from Years 1 and 2 read and looked carefully at their reading records. I found that they are making good progress in using phonics over time to sound out unfamiliar words and are reading widely and often at home.

- This good progress in phonics is also reflected in the school's accurate tracking of pupils' progress in reading in Year 1, where a high proportion of pupils have made good progress since the beginning of the autumn term. Leaders have effectively reversed the previous decline through rigorous monitoring and support, to ensure that phonics is taught more systematically. The school's own accurate data shows that nearly all pupils in Year 2 who did not reach the required standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check are on course to reach it now.
- I also wanted to find out whether all current pupils at key stage 2, including the disadvantaged, those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and the most able, are making good progress in mathematics from their different starting points. This was because in 2017 all pupils, including these different groups, were not making strong progress in mathematics compared to other pupils nationally, or compared to the progress they were making in other subjects. The school's latest information, about the progress that current pupils are making in all year groups at key stage 2, clearly shows that all groups of pupils are making good progress from their different starting points.
- We saw examples of pupils deepening their reasoning skills when we looked at their work. However, there were sometimes missed opportunities for pupils to show their reasoning and levels of mastery in their work.
- Finally, I wanted to know whether leaders had improved teaching and learning to reverse the decline in 2017 in pupils' progress in reading and mathematics. This was because turbulence in leadership contributed to the dip in performance. Following this, you worked effectively with senior leaders and subject leaders successfully to reverse the decline. Subject leaders reviewed their schemes of work and improved resources for teaching and learning. They also reviewed the progress pupils were making over time and visited lessons to look at the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress.
- As a result, the mathematics leader has ensured that teachers are developing pupils' mastery of mathematics, providing more opportunities for problem solving and for applying their knowledge of mathematics to real-life situations. The English leader has ensured that teachers have developed their skills in guided reading and promoted a strong culture for reading across the school. With strong support from senior leaders, these measures have led to rapid improvements in the progress pupils are making in reading and mathematics at key stage 2. The school's accurate data reflects the good progress that all pupils are now making.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers build on the good progress that current pupils are making in mathematics by checking pupils' work to ensure that they are using every opportunity to deepen their reasoning skills
- they review their self-evaluation so that it accurately reflects the impact of leadership on pupils' good achievement in reading and mathematics compared to

their weaker achievement in 2016/17.

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

Declan McCarthy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, to determine the impact of teaching on pupils' learning over time, I carried out joint visits to lessons with you, including in the early years. I also sampled pupils' work, including children's learning journals and heard eight pupils read from Years 1 and 2. I talked to pupils about their learning and progress and I took account of their views from the responses to 18 questionnaires. I also took account of the views of parents by looking at the 67 online questionnaire, Parent View, responses and their 35 free-text responses. I examined the questionnaire responses from 26 staff.

I met with you, your senior leaders, subject leaders, the special educational needs coordinator (SENco) and four governors and I held telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I looked at a range of documentation including: minutes of governing body meetings and records of governors' visits; safeguarding procedures and policies; risk assessments; attendance figures and incidents of behaviour; your self-evaluation and school improvement plan.