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Dear Mr Garnett

Short inspection of North Primary School and Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 31 October 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 September 2012.

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 staff continue to provide a warm and positive ethos. This promotes a strong sense of community across the school and makes pupils feel that they belong. In addition, you have sustained the strengths identified in the behaviour and personal development of pupils at the time of the previous inspection. Pupils are safe and happy at school. They are polite and show respect not only to adults but also to one another. Pupils and staff are proud of their school and the work they do together. Parents, staff and governors value your leadership and it is clear that you are ambitious for the school to be even better.

Classrooms are calm, orderly and purposeful. Pupils are keen to do well and put effort into their work. In lessons, they focus effectively on what they are learning and explain their work clearly. The quality of presentation of work in books is consistently good. Children in the early years benefit from well-developed practical activities, inside and outdoors, which engage their interests and active participation. These, together with the caring support and encouragement of staff, enable children's learning to flourish. Standards of attainment in the early years show a good rising trend over four years. An above-average proportion of children achieved a good level of development in 2017.

Leaders have a good understanding of how well the school is performing and are accurate in their assessment of its strengths and weaknesses. Leaders at all levels are clear about their roles and keen to make the educational provision in the school

the best it can be. You and your staff are open to new ideas and you use your links with other schools well to support continued improvement and to share best practice. Governors provide a very effective mix of challenge and support to you and your staff. They ask the questions they need to in order to ensure that the school continues to perform well.

Working closely with your leadership team, you have improved the school further since the previous inspection. Standards of work in literacy and numeracy are improving well, especially in key stage 1. You have taken effective action to work on the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report. Teaching in mathematics is now much better, and most pupils are making good progress as a result. The work you have been doing, as part of a group of three schools locally, to review, support and develop educational provision has been particularly effective in helping you secure the improvement in mathematics. Pupils have better opportunities to develop and improve their writing in subjects across the curriculum. High-quality writing on display reflects much good development in the writing that pupils produce in different subjects. Written work is especially strong in history and geography. Pupils are positive about reading and enjoy the books they read. Hence, they are developing a love of reading, although some are still not reading regularly enough. The school has identified that pupils are finding comprehension work more difficult, given the raised expectations in the current national curriculum. While most pupils continue to make good progress in reading and writing, you acknowledge that there is more to do to strengthen outcomes further by the end of key stage 2.

Parents responding to the Ofsted survey, Parent View, are very positive about the school and its educational provision. They particularly praised the school's ethos and the way in which it cares for and supports individuals and families. This is encapsulated well in the following comment from a parent: 'The school is very inclusive and teaches the children to respect others and be kind and compassionate.' From our observations around the school and my meetings with pupils, it is clear that they are supportive of one another. Pupils who join the school from other schools part way through their primary education settle in quickly because of the warm and friendly atmosphere.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders promote a culture of care, and staff are vigilant about pupils' welfare and safety. You, as the designated lead for safeguarding, ensure that any issues of safety are followed up effectively and you maintain good oversight of any pupil whose well-being or welfare raises any concerns. In addition, you and other staff follow up pupils whose attendance is low to make sure that this is not due to issues of safety or safeguarding.

Governors receive regular reports on how the school is managing safeguarding and undertake regular safeguarding training alongside staff. The leadership team ensures that all safeguarding is fit for purpose.

Inspection findings

- As part of the inspection, I identified a number of key lines of enquiry to explore with you. My first area for exploration was the extent to which teaching in literacy meets the needs of middle-attaining pupils in key stage 2, especially boys. This was because middle-ability boys made less progress than other groups in the end of key stage 2 tests both in 2016 and in 2017. It was clear from our visits to lessons and other evidence, that you and your staff are working actively to ensure that different groups make equally good progress as they move through the school. Teachers are aware of the different abilities of pupils and use assessment well to identify any gaps they may have, including those of pupils who join the school from other primary schools.
- The teaching of reading is focusing increasingly well on ensuring that pupils, including middle-attaining pupils, understand the vocabulary they come across in their reading and develop a wider range of words to use when writing. English books show, however, that some middle-attaining boys do not write as extensively as girls. At times, they use a narrower range of vocabulary and often their spelling is weaker. Sometimes, difficulties in handwriting get in the way of boys' written work.
- I also followed through how well pupils are writing across the curriculum to see how opportunities for writing in subjects other than English are helping to improve pupils' writing skills, especially those of middle-attaining boys in key stage 2. Much work has been done to develop the wider curriculum. Topics chosen, such as the current topic in history across key stage 2 about the Vikings, enthuse pupils and appeal to boys as much as they do to girls. Boys of all abilities are writing enthusiastically about the history of the Vikings. Teachers are asking pupils to consider questions such as, 'Why were the Vikings such successful invaders?' in their writing. Such questions provide pupils with good opportunities to be enquiring and analytical and to reflect their findings effectively in their writing.
- While there is more work to do to improve the writing of middle-attaining boys, especially in key stage 2, the writing in subjects other than English is supporting them well to develop a wider vocabulary and improve their spelling and use of grammar. In effect, the wider curriculum is contributing well to the school's work on improving standards of literacy. Lower down the school, in key stage 1, writing in other subjects is effectively strengthening standards for all groups of pupils.
- My next line of enquiry focused on the effectiveness of the use of the pupil premium funding. This was partly because of higher levels of absence among some disadvantaged pupils and partly because fewer disadvantaged pupils achieve at greater depth in national curriculum tests than other pupils. You and other leaders told me that you are working on reducing some of the differences in learning that persist between disadvantaged pupils and others.
- The school is making good use of the pupil premium funding to support pupils lower down the school, who are experiencing speech and language difficulties. Evidence shows that most disadvantaged pupils are making good progress and

are meeting age-related expectations. However, not enough are making the more rapid progress needed to achieve the greater depth standard, especially by the end of key stage 2.

- The pupil premium funding is used effectively to reach out to parents and families in which pupils are not attending school regularly enough or are persistently late. The school goes out of its way to improve attendance levels, not just of disadvantaged pupils but also of those who have special educational needs. Consequently, you have achieved key successes in turning around poor attendance. Attendance levels are improving well and persistent absence is falling. A very small number of parents, however, are still not making sure that their children attend regularly or on time.
- My final line of enquiry focused on the extent to which the school is providing equality of opportunity. This was because the website did not include all the required information relating to equalities. The school has up-to-date policies that cover equal opportunities well and ensure that the school is accessible for any pupil who has disabilities. Staff and governors value the diversity among pupils in the school and speak warmly about how well they get on with one another.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they build on the current work to improve reading to develop the writing skills of middle-ability pupils, especially boys, in key stage 2, particularly in relation to their spelling, vocabulary and handwriting
- more disadvantaged pupils make increased progress to achieve greater depth in their learning
- they continue to work with parents so that persistent absence or lateness is reduced further.

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

Gulshanbir Kayembe
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you to discuss progress since the previous inspection and to agree the key lines of enquiry. In addition, I held meetings with three members of the governing body, including the chair and vice chair of governors, members of the senior leadership team and subject leaders. I also telephoned the local authority

officer attached to the school. As part of the inspection, I looked at a variety of documents and records, including your self-evaluation summary, the school improvement plan and the school's assessment information. I also scrutinised the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, the records of checks that leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children, and information relating to attendance and behaviour. We jointly undertook observations across the school and talked to pupils about their learning. I looked at pupils' current written work and some work from the last academic year. I observed pupils around the school and held a discussion with two groups of pupils from Years 3 to 6. I took into account the 70 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as written comments submitted by parents. I also looked at the responses of 37 pupils and 26 members of staff to Ofsted surveys.