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Mr Gary Brown
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Dear Mr Brown

Short inspection of Ashdon Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 September 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 October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Community is at the heart of all of the work that goes on in Ashdon Primary School. Each child, pupil, adult and parent is a member of your small school 'family'. You lead the school by setting the highest example; that you will 'go the extra mile' for children and pupils in your care. Your dedicated and skilled governing body shares this passion for the education of children in your community, and works alongside you diligently to continue to secure the future of the school.

You constantly look at the school's provision with a 'glass half full' as you truly believe that you can always improve pupils' experiences in some way. You, ably supported by your senior teacher and governors, refuse to resort to quick fixes as you want every action to make meaningful and genuine differences to pupils. This ethos is wholeheartedly shared by staff. Consequently, staff are highly competent, dedicated and passionate about their work. This means that children and pupils receive a consistently high standard of education across the school, leading to very high standards of attainment in the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2, with some exceptional provision in Years 5 and 6.

Pupils love to learn at your school. The youngest children from Reception onwards settle quickly because adults establish routines and get to know children and pupils

as individuals. Pupils receive a rich curriculum which is often personalised to their needs and interests. Pupils speak highly of their school experience. By the time that pupils leave the school, they are thoughtful, articulate and caring young people, who are well prepared for their secondary education.

Most parents are incredibly happy with the school's provision. Parents who spoke to me during my visit, and almost all parents on Parent View, were glowing in their praise for you as headteacher, and your team. This is because your team listen to parents and care about their views. Through an active parent-teacher association and a proactive and skilled governing body, there are also lots of opportunities for parents to voice their opinions and engage with the school community, through events like the 3k and 10k fun runs.

Refusing to ever stand still, you have identified that there is still further work to embed the improvements you have brought to the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You also acknowledge that although the provision in Reception is good, the outdoor area is not yet providing a stimulating enough learning environment for children.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, as the designated safeguarding leader, ensure that your staff are well trained in identifying and reporting any concerns about the well-being of pupils. Written records are kept studiously, and act as a good record of the actions taken by you and others in keeping children and pupils safe, over the course of time.

You and your staff work effectively with external agencies to support pupils, including specialist teams for social, emotional and mental health needs. You work closely with the professionals from these services to ensure that pupils receive joined-up support from you all. The communication between yourselves and these professionals is making a positive difference in the care that you give to your pupils.

Your monitoring of attendance is meticulous and consequently, the attendance of all pupils, including different groups of pupils, is consistently better than the national average. Your home-school liaison worker liaises with parents to help build positive relationships and give support to pupils and their families. This is making a real difference in helping get pupils into school frequently, and subsequently engage with their learning.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was around understanding the impact of the significant increase in the numbers of pupils identified at the school as having special educational needs and/or disabilities since the previous inspection, including the numbers of pupils who require an education, health and care plan.
- You have faced numerous challenges since the previous inspection in securing the appropriate provision and support for these vulnerable pupils. You have used a broad range of specialist external advice and, on occasion, trial and error, to

implement and review this provision, to get it right. You have also tailored pupils' curriculum, so that it meets not only their needs, but also their aspirations and interests.

- You have refused to give up on pupils, even when, in a few instances, they have exhibited the most challenging behaviours. For example, you have re-written and trained staff in a reviewed behaviour policy that you have developed so that it is more inclusive of all pupils. This is making a real difference to helping pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, where they need support to communicate with others effectively.
- As a result, pupils with the most complex needs have highly personalised support that is starting to make a profound difference to their confidence and progress. Getting this provision right for pupils has required significant professional development for all staff, but they have exhibited remarkable resilience and willingness to develop and apply their skills.
- Staff are now embedding these strategies even further to help pupils acquire independence in their learning and development. You also identify that there are a number of pupils who potentially require more specialist provision, although there is little in the locality on offer. The future for these pupils remains a concern for you, and you continue to work with the local authority and parents to tenaciously chase the right next placement for these pupils.
- Through the inspection we also identified that there needs to be more precise review of some pupils' assessment, throughout their time at the school, to see whether their needs are still significant and additional or that they simply require catch-up support.
- My second line of enquiry was to review the provision in mathematics. This is because this was identified as an area for improvement in 2013 when you were last visited by inspectors.
- The provision for mathematics is a real strength in the school. The collective planning and support between your staff means that pupils get a consistently good and personalised experience in all year groups. For example, you and the team have worked hard on developing assessment in mathematics that makes a real difference to pupils' understanding and teachers' planning. As a result, mathematics outcomes are very high year on year, especially in key stage 2, and pupils develop a delight in attempting harder challenges in the subject.
- My final line of enquiry was to review your wider curriculum throughout the school, and how you develop writing within this. This was because your website did not give a detailed overview of the curriculum provision for pupils. Moreover, most pupils in your smaller-than-average-sized school have relatively limited opportunities to engage with classmates from different backgrounds, countries, cultures and faiths in the school. I was keen to see how you were preparing pupils for their roles as citizens in the wider world.
- Your team ensure that every activity to support pupils to embrace the diversity in British society is undertaken meaningfully. Pupils speak highly of the curriculum which teaches them the importance of valuing people's differences, and welcoming people from varied backgrounds. Your 'challenge' assemblies have

also provided creative opportunities for your children and pupils of all ages, and their parents, to engage in wider understanding of themselves, and the wider society in modern Britain.

- A display board in your assembly hall typifies the experience that pupils get in the wider curriculum in your school. It shows how pupils have engaged with the democratic process through studying different political ideas. Pupils' interest with this activity is demonstrated in the high-quality written work that they have produced, which reflects an empathy with people and a deep-rooted understanding of the importance of humanity and kindness to everyone.
- Inspection evidence confirms that the quality of pupils' writing is securely good across the curriculum and exemplary in Years 5 and 6, especially in history and geography. Pupils enjoy their writing experiences, where teachers cleverly interweave the wider curriculum, and essential rules around spelling, punctuation and grammar. For those few pupils who do not reach the expected standards, teachers ensure that they monitor progress from their various starting points. As a result, these pupils make securely good progress from much lower starting points than their peers.
- You ensure that pupils access a broad curriculum, including art, French, individual music tuition, forest school, and a range of sporting activities. Pupils speak highly of the multi-use games area and the outdoor gym, as well as the breaktime and lunchtime games which encourage them to engage with sport and build confidence among some of your most vulnerable pupils. You use your additional sport funding with real impact. Your new subject leader for physical education (PE) has made a quick start of further widening pupils' participation and enthusiasm for sport and fitness.
- As part of our review of the wider curriculum, we looked at the outdoor provision in the early years. We identified many strengths in the early years curriculum, including the forest school activities. However, you acknowledge that the outdoor environment is not as well-resourced or as stimulating for children to learn creatively as it should be.
- The location of your small school and the changing demographics in the local area mean that it is becoming increasingly difficult to ensure that pupils get access to the nearest secondary school when they leave you. In response to this, you and your governing body have secured good working relationships with feeder secondary schools so that pupils get effective transition support when they are about to leave you to move into Year 7.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they further embed the specialist skills that they have developed to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and that leaders continue to work with the local authority to find these pupils specialist next-step provisions when they require them
- they develop the outdoor area and associated learning activities in the early

years, so that this enhances the provision for pupils to further learn and develop in a creative and stimulating outdoor environment.

I am copying this letter to the joint chairs 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

Kim Pigram
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with you, the senior teacher, the special educational needs coordinator, and all teachers. All teachers take responsibility for an aspect of the school's work, so I also was able to review the wider curriculum work in history, geography, science, art, and PE. I also met with members of the governing body, including the joint chairs. I also met with a representative from the local authority. You and I visited all classes, including the Reception class. We looked at pupils' work while we were in some of those lessons. I also undertook a work scrutiny of pupils' work separately. I spoke with pupils throughout the day, and met with a small group of pupils formally. I took account of the Ofsted's online questionnaire responses from 37 parents, as well as 15 staff responses and 22 pupil responses. I reviewed a range of school documentation, including information related to safeguarding and pupils' progress.