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Ms Sara Radley
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Radley

Short inspection of Rock Ferry Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 2 February 2016, 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 May 2011.

This school continues to be good.

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

Pupils at Rock Ferry Primary School are eager to learn because you, senior leaders and teachers have created a climate where pupils believe anything is possible and that they can be successful in their learning. As one pupil explained to me, 'I like maths now because my teacher has helped me turn "I can't" into "I can"'. As a result, pupils arrive at school relishing their opportunities to learn.

Pupils act as excellent advocates of the school and wear their uniform with a sense of pride. Pupils that I spoke to during playtime and lessons were clear that they enjoy coming to school, with several stating this was because of the support they receive from adults. Pupils are polite and respectful towards visitors and each other. During my visit, they eagerly engaged in mature and thoughtful discussions, proudly explaining different aspects of their school.

The areas identified as in need of improvement at the previous Ofsted inspection have been tackled, although some aspects still remain a focus for the school. Attainment in English and mathematics has risen substantially since the time of the previous inspection, when reading and writing standards were significantly below the national average. Pupils in all subjects make progress that is at least in line with that seen nationally and as a result, the standards that pupils reach by the time

they have left Year 6 do not differ significantly from national standards. Nonetheless, you recognise that there is room for further improvement and aspire to even higher standards.

Changes to the way writing is taught across the school, which now involves using high-quality texts to inspire and enthuse pupils, have helped to address the issues of sequencing writing and promoting speaking skills, also identified at the time of the last inspection. Pupils' books show that they now write across a wide range of subjects for a variety of purposes. Most pupils clearly have a good understanding of the structure of a wide variety of writing genres and sequence their work effectively.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding and pastoral support lie at the heart of all that the school does. Those pupils who spoke to me during my inspection report that they are safe in school and trust adults to resolve any issues that they may have. Furthermore, 100% of parents and staff who replied to the Ofsted online survey say that pupils are safe at school. Robust checks are in place to ensure that those who work with children are suitable to do so. All staff have undertaken appropriate safeguarding training and policies and procedures are fully up to date.

Inspection findings

- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors have successfully developed a culture of high ambition for the pupils of the school. Actions taken by the headteacher since her appointment in September 2014 have impacted positively on the quality of teaching and learning. As a result, outcomes for pupils are improving rapidly. In 2015, the standards that pupils reached at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 improved significantly from those of the previous year.
- Senior leaders keep a close eye on the quality of teaching and learning. They are regular visitors to classrooms and check on the quality of work in pupils' books. They use the information they gather to support improvements and hold teachers to account. All members of staff who completed the Ofsted online survey agreed that leaders use professional development to encourage, challenge and support teachers' improvement.
- Subject leaders of mathematics and English have their fingers on the pulse of their subjects, knowing with certainty their strengths and weaknesses. Their actions for improvement have had a positive impact on outcomes for pupils. The introduction of 'animal awards', for instance, to improve basic skills in mathematics, is paying dividends. Likewise, 'red hot reader' awards to recognise good reading are helping to develop a love of books across the school.
- The school has introduced new systems to track the progress that pupils are making in the new National Curriculum. As a result, leaders and teachers have a good understanding of where any gaps in pupils' knowledge lie. Where pupils are identified as being at risk of falling behind, extra support is swiftly put into place to help them catch up.

- Governors bring a wide range of complementary skills to bear in undertaking their role (including keeping pupils safe). They use their regular visits to school wisely, seeing for themselves what impact leaders' actions are having in the classroom. Detailed reports from the headteacher further ensure that governors have the information they require to provide robust challenge to leaders, allowing governors to hold them to account for the effects of their actions.
- The work of leaders and teachers to develop pupils' skills to become effective learners is a strength of the school. Pupils relish learning in their classrooms and now approach challenge with resilience and positivity. Support from the recently formed pastoral team further contributes to helping pupils overcome social and emotional barriers to their learning. As one governor stated, 'we have invested considerable resources so that we have everything in place to enable our pupils to flourish in their learning'.
- The introduction of resources to help teachers plan mathematics lessons has been effective. Pupils' books show that they are making good progress over time. Teachers provide an appropriate mix of activities that include problem-solving activities that deepen understanding. However, in some classes, particularly those for the most able, small groups of pupils are sometimes given work that does not offer them sufficient challenge.
- Leaders ensure that the extra funding received for disadvantaged pupils is spent effectively. The progress that this group of pupils makes is diligently tracked, and support is put in place to help those pupils who require it. As a result, their progress in 2015 was in line with that seen nationally.
- Actions to improve attendance are beginning to reap rewards. The newly appointed member of staff with responsibility for this area monitors attendance rigorously, following up any persistent absences robustly. As a result, overall attendance is beginning to improve towards the national average. Nonetheless, attendance remains an area for improvement for the school.
- In most lessons, teaching assistants are used effectively to promote learning. This is because they have strong subject knowledge and know what teachers expect of them. In a Year 2 mathematics lesson, for example, pupils' learning rocketed as they worked with a teaching assistant on a practical activity to embed their understanding of division. However, in a very small number of lessons observed, teaching assistants did not have such a strong impact on pupils' learning. This was due to skills and confidence that were not as strong as those seen elsewhere in the school.
- The basic skills of spelling, punctuation and grammar are being taught effectively. Pupils apply these skills with growing confidence across a wide range of subjects. Teachers' expectations are equally high across all areas of the curriculum. In a mathematics book, for instance, misspelt words were brought to pupils' attention so that they were able to correct them.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most-able pupils are given work that fully challenges them in mathematics
- those teaching assistants that require it receive the training they need in order to have a positive impact in all classes across the school
- the recent work to improve attendance continues and develops, further increasing attendance until 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 Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Martin Bell
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, subject leaders, four members of the governing body, a member of the local authority, the person responsible for maintaining safeguarding records and the person responsible for attendance. Documents were scrutinised, including the school development plan, records of safeguarding checks, minutes of meetings, and records of checks on the quality of teaching. I also visited a number of classrooms with you to speak to pupils, look at their books and observe their learning. I scrutinised a number of mathematics, English and topic books. I also took account of the 11 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) as well as the 24 responses to the staff survey and 20 responses to the pupil survey.