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Mrs Cheryl Woolf
Executive Head
Friars Primary School and Nursery
Constable Way
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Dear Mrs Woolf

Short inspection of Friars Primary School and Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 16 July 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in December 2014.

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 have ensured that this is a school where pupils and staff work together to create a harmonious learning community where pupils can thrive. There are positive relationships between staff and pupils, and pupils enjoy coming to school. Consequently, attendance is good. You and your governors have established strong relationships with parents and carers. The recent family picnic sports day held at the school was a very successful event which raised the profile of the school within the local community. Parents who spoke to me were extremely positive about the support the school offers and the progress their children were making. Free-text comments left on Ofsted's online survey included, 'Children here are taught to be all-round happy, kind and well-adjusted young people.' Another stated: 'The school teaches children as individuals and adapts learning styles to suit everyone.'

Pupils told me how much they enjoyed the competitive sporting opportunities that the school offers. They pointed out with pride the numerous trophies that school teams have won in local events. The school is fortunate to have extensive outside play areas. A wide range of equipment has been purchased that pupils use to help them keep active, fit, and fully occupied during breaktimes.

Pupils' behaviour is a real strength of the school. Pupils are friendly and polite, both to each other and to adults. In lessons, they are committed and inquisitive learners, reflecting the aims of the school. This has contributed to the good progress that pupils make across the school. They told me that lessons are fun, and that work is challenging, but that there is always a teacher to help those who need more support.

The trust provides effective support for the school. Staff spoke enthusiastically about the many opportunities the trust provides for additional training to help them refine and advance their professional practice. This year, using practice from within the trust, classrooms now all have 'working walls'. These display key information across subject areas, which pupils refer to. The school's chosen approach to the learning environment helps to consolidate learning.

Governors take responsibility for the day-to-day support and challenge to the school. They know the school well and are aspirational for what pupils can achieve. They are diligent in their duties and visit the school regularly to talk to staff and pupils, to check on their welfare. Documentation seen shows the appropriate challenge given to you and your leaders, so that pupils' achievement continues to improve.

Safeguarding is effective.

A culture of safeguarding is evident in the school. The school's arrangements for safeguarding are fit for purpose. Leaders follow up concerns diligently and seek timely support from outside agencies when necessary. All parents and staff who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaires say that the school keeps pupils safe. Pupils, too, feel safe at school and understand the need for internet safety. They say that the timetabled lessons and visits from outside agencies help them understand how to avoid potential risks. Pupils said that if they have worries, they can always talk to an adult in the school.

Governors actively fulfil their obligations to ensure that pupils are safe in school. They visit the school and talk to staff to check that they discharge safeguarding duties thoroughly. They also make sure that staff receive appropriate safeguarding training and that pre-employment checks are carried out on new staff.

Inspection findings

- I pursued several lines of enquiry to ascertain whether the school continues to be good. First, I considered how leaders are building a challenging, coherent curriculum to enable all pupils to make strong progress across the school.
- This year, you and your staff introduced 'the connected curriculum' to map links across different subject areas. Subject leaders have ensured that learning within these areas reflects national curriculum objectives. They have consulted with subject leaders across the trust and use these professional conversations to help further refine and improve teaching of the broader curriculum. As a result, work seen in pupils' books at key stage 2 shows that subjects such as history and

geography are presenting a good level of challenge to pupils. However, technical, subject-specific vocabulary has yet to be consistently used by pupils in their work, so that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

- The curriculum also provides a varied and exciting diet of different visits, trips and clubs which pupils say that they really appreciate. Bright, current and imaginative displays show an inclusive selection of pupils' written reflections of these experiences. These illustrate the growth in their understanding of the wider world gained through these enriching opportunities.
- I looked at how well you use assessment to identify those who are falling behind and need to catch up. Attainment in writing for some pupils at the end of key stage 2 and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 was disappointing last year. You have taken decisive action to improve achievement.
- In writing, you have made effective use of assessment to identify pupils' individual needs by, for example, improving sentence structure or using more complex vocabulary. Teachers use individual support, in and out of the classroom, to ensure that imperfections in writing are quickly resolved. You understand the need to ensure that teachers build on this good practice so that all pupils continue to make good or better progress in their writing.
- In mathematics, the careful use of assessment across all key stages has provided an insight into exact gaps in pupils' understanding which prevent pupils from remembering key mathematical knowledge. These topics are now revisited, as often as pupils need, to ensure that important concepts become embedded. Teachers plan interesting, engaging activities that capture and build upon pupils' interests. This was evident as pupils concentrated intently, using shapes and mirrors to construct reflections. Skilful questioning further stretches the understanding of the more able. The results from recent external national tests show that attainment in writing at key stage 2 and mathematics at key stage 1 has improved this year for all groups of pupils, including for those working at greater depth.
- I also wanted to explore what support you give to pupils who do not meet the required standard in the phonics reading check by the end of Year 2; also, how strong the culture of reading is in the school.
- Phonics is taught systematically in the school from nursery and through to Year 2. The literacy leader makes sure that phonics is taught through providing regular staff training. My observations found that the teaching of phonics is accurate, fast-paced and fun. Adults engage pupils keenly in their learning through expertly crafted activities. Each teacher adapts tasks to the needs of the group, so pupils build up confidence to take a chance sounding out a word, even when they are unsure.
- All classrooms present a language-rich environment and teachers use challenging vocabulary to extend pupils' language acquisition. Information is provided to parents so they, too, can support their child to become a fluent reader. Teachers read to pupils every day to build familiarity with a story and consolidate new vocabulary.

- Leaders identify those who are falling behind with their early reading and appropriate interventions are put in place. I read with some pupils in key stage 2 who have found reading challenging and they are now making good progress due to the effective support your staff provide.
- Finally, I explored how well you support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has put strong systems in place to identify individual barriers to learning. She carries out a detailed evaluation of each pupil's needs and plans with teachers an individual programme to meet these needs in the classroom. These programmes are adjusted if needed. Inspection activity confirmed that pupils with SEND are well supported, including by additional adults, to make good progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to improve the progress all pupils make, especially in writing, by consolidating teachers' use of assessment to accurately identify and address pupils' specific needs
- teachers plan lessons in subjects other than English and mathematics that encourage pupils to incorporate rich, subject-specific language in their writing.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Southend-on-Sea. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kay Leach
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, other school leaders and staff, a member of the trust, governors and a group of pupils. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority and also with a representative of the alternative provision used by the school. With you and other school leaders, I visited a range of classes to observe teaching, to look at pupils' books and to see them working.

I examined the school's development plan, the school's safeguarding arrangements, records and files. I heard pupils read and saw pupils at play before the start of the day. I checked attendance on the day of the inspection. I considered the views of parents I spoke with at the start of the school day. I took into account the views of 60 parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including the 20 free-text comments submitted.

I also took into account the 45 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and 24 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.