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Mrs Ceri Nelson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Nelson

Short inspection of Reddal Hill Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 31 January 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 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You expect high standards of work and conduct from pupils and you have equally high expectations of members of staff. Pupils, parents and staff appreciate your leadership and the impact that it has had on maintaining a high quality of education in the school. Almost all staff who responded to the online inspection questionnaire and the great majority of parents who responded to Parent View, or who spoke with me during the inspection, said that the school is well led and managed. One parent summed up the views of several when she wrote, 'My child has had an excellent experience at school. I am always impressed with the behaviour of students when we attend praise assemblies. Mrs Nelson and her team are always welcoming and are well respected by pupils and parents.'

You, your senior leaders and governors know the school well, including its many strengths and few weaknesses. You acknowledge weaknesses but then ensure that they are tackled quickly and effectively. For example, following disappointing results in the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2015, you revised the way that phonics is taught, using ideas gleaned from other schools. Consequently, results rose sharply in 2016 to be slightly above the national figure.

Similarly, you identified weaknesses in the school's early years provision. Many children join Nursery and Reception with starting points well below those typical for their age. By the end of Reception, the proportion achieving a good level of development has been well below the national average for two years.

In response to what you judge to be insufficient progress, you have completely overhauled the school's early years provision. New leadership of this area has resulted in rapid improvement. The environment is now well organised, attractive and stimulating and the outdoor area is being used increasingly well. Assessments are accurate and used well to plan each child's next steps. Expert extra help is given to children who need it, for example in developing their speaking. Adults plan effectively and parents are becoming more involved in their child's education. Together, these improvements are seeing children's progress accelerate rapidly. The greatest impact is evident in improving boys' literacy, previously the weakest single area.

However, there is still room for further improvement in this area and some teaching of early writing still lacks precision. For example, some pupils continue to form letters incorrectly and this continues into Year 1. Although the issue is addressed by the end of Year 2, some pupils' progress has been slowed as a result.

At the previous inspection, you were tasked with improving the progress of higher-attaining pupils in writing and mathematics and ensuring that pupils of all abilities are sufficiently challenged.

Mathematics teaching is strong across year groups and high expectations of pupils of all abilities, including the most able, are evident. There is a very high degree of consistency of approach across key stages 1 and 2. Pupils become fluent in their basic skills, such as times tables. They also become increasingly able to use this fluency as they think, reason and solve problems. Teachers give the most able pupils problems that make them think hard and so deepen their understanding. Pupils produce copious amounts of impeccably presented work in their mathematics books. They are very well motivated because they enjoy mathematics and rise to the challenges presented to them.

Writing has improved strongly since the previous inspection and by the end of Year 6 pupils' progress is significantly better than that seen nationally. Pupils write at length, in detail and with precision.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding policies and procedures are fit for purpose, well understood, and used by all staff. All records relating to pupils' safety are detailed and stored securely. Staff and governors are well trained and confident to pass on any concerns they have. Procedures to recruit staff safely are used well.

Pupils feel safe and well cared for. All pupils who spoke with me said that they feel safe in school. They said that bullying is very rare and they trust adults to deal with any that does happen. Pupils also understand how to keep themselves safe. For example, pupils told me how to say safe when using the internet, never to put personal details online and to be aware that some people may not be who they claim to be.

All members of staff who completed the online inspection questionnaire said that pupils are safe in school, as did almost all parents who responded to Parent View.

Inspection findings

- Key stage 2 outcomes in reading, which had improved steadily for three years up to 2015, were a little disappointing in 2016, especially for middle-ability pupils. Leaders believe that several pupils did not cope well with the new format of the Year 6 tests and have addressed this issue with current pupils and better outcomes are anticipated this year. There is a strong culture of reading across the school. Pupils read widely and often and they enjoy reading. Pupils have access to high-quality books and recently introduced online reading resources, which are already proving popular. Much of the teaching of reading, including phonics, is effective, but some aspects are less effective. Some guided reading activities are not well-enough focused on improving the key skills that pupils need to develop. Consequently, guided reading does not always contribute well to improving pupils' reading.
- The governance of the school is strong. Governors know the school well and provide effective support and challenge to you and your leadership team. Governors are reflective and they constantly seek ways to improve their contribution to the school. For example, following a recent review they are actively seeking to speak more with parents to gain their views about the school. Having heard from some parents that they would like more after-school childcare, they are poised to survey all parents to find out if there is sufficient demand to make such provision viable.
- There is a very strong team ethic across the school's staff. All staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire said that they have a clear understanding of the school's aims and almost all said that they are proud to be a member of staff at Reddal Hill. Staff share your deep commitment to providing the best possible education for all of your pupils.
- Attendance is consistently higher than the national average for primary schools and few pupils are persistently absent. Leaders are tenacious in pursuing absence and they work closely with parents to ensure that pupils attend regularly.
- Pupils are confident, articulate and very proud of their school. They demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning in lessons when they are enthusiastic and keen to offer answers to questions. They take great pride in the work they complete. At breaktimes and lunchtimes, pupils play sensibly, look after each other and behave well. Pupils enjoy coming to school. They like their lessons and they value the range of activities and trips that supplement the taught curriculum.
- The school is a popular choice with parents. It is expanding and by 2018, each year group will have two classes.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- Raise standards in the early years foundation stage by improving the teaching of early writing skills.
- Ensure that guided reading effectively develops those skills where pupils are weakest.

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

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your senior leadership team. I visited several classes during the day with senior leaders, where we observed teaching and learning and spoke with pupils about their work. I talked with many pupils in lessons and at breaktime and lunchtime. I listened to pupils read and talked to them about reading and the books they enjoy. I met with the chair of the governing body. I scrutinised several documents including your self-evaluation, minutes of governing body meetings, and safeguarding and child protection records. I talked with several parents as they dropped their children off at the start of the school day. I considered 19 responses to Parent View, including 13 'free text' comments and 21 responses from members of staff to the online inspection questionnaire.

At our initial meeting we agreed four focus areas for the inspection. These were:

- why outcomes were lower in reading than writing in both key stages 1 and 2 in 2016
- the level of challenge in mathematics, especially for the most able pupils
- standards achieved in the early years foundation stage, especially by boys in reading and writing
- the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding procedures.