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Mr Gregory Doey
Executive Headteacher
Bellenden Primary School
Dewar Street
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Dear Mr Doey

Short inspection of Bellenden Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 September 2018, 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

In September 2017, following a year as interim executive headteacher, your appointment as substantive executive headteacher was confirmed. You have led a successful hard federation with a neighbouring school. In February 2018, you led the relocation of the existing school into a brand new building.

You have maintained a focus on continual improvement, and provide strong leadership based on high expectations of all staff and pupils. You and your head of school are an effective team.

You have successfully addressed the key areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Leaders now share subject knowledge and expertise across the federation. Pupils are now provided with regular opportunities to draft and edit their work, and to make it even better.

Parents are supportive of school leaders, and appreciate the high priority that staff place on the welfare and personal development of pupils. Parents also recognise your strong commitment to a fully inclusive school. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school, including in the playgrounds, is good. Pupils are enthusiastic when they respond to questions in lessons, and show positive attitudes to learning.

Governors ensure that they understand the strengths and key priorities of the school. They are well informed, and ask challenging questions of senior leaders. They support your drive to bring about further improvements to pupils' progress and outcomes.

Progress and attainment in mathematics has been stronger than in reading and writing in the last few years. You understand there is a need to strengthen outcomes and progress for pupils in reading and writing, including for the most able pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and records are detailed and of high quality. The single central record is maintained to a high standard. Case studies show that the school takes early action to ensure the safety and welfare of pupils. Governors, including the designated safeguarding governor, ask detailed questions to ensure that safeguarding is effective. Training is kept up to date and ensures that staff have a good awareness of health and safety concerns in the local community, such as traffic and air pollution. Leaders have developed a strong culture of safeguarding in school.

Pupils understand how to keep safe online, and say that they feel safe in school. Leaders meet monthly to discuss how best to support vulnerable pupils. Parents and pupils say that behaviour is good and that instances of bullying are rare. Leaders have detailed knowledge of families and are aware of the needs and concerns of individual pupils.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed to focus on pupils' achievement in writing. In the 2017 writing assessments, pupils' attainment was below the expected standard compared to other pupils nationally in both key stages. Progress in writing was also slower than in the other core subjects. You identified improving pupils' outcomes in writing as a key area for development.
- The school has a strong drive on improving pupils' writing skills. In the early years, we saw teachers help children improve their letter formation and mark-making skills. In key stage 1, pupils are keenly developing their handwriting skills and practising cursive handwriting. Pupils in Year 1 are confident in applying their phonics knowledge to read new words and write simple sentences. By Year 2, pupils are beginning to write in different styles, including book reviews and diary entries.
- In key stage 2, pupils' books show that they are developing their vocabulary skills and applying these to their writing. In Year 6, pupils are proud of their special books where they draft and edit their story writing.
- Leaders identified the need for pupils to develop a stronger knowledge of English grammar, punctuation and spelling. Pupils in key stage 2 now have more opportunities to write at length and in a wide variety of genres. Pupils also

practise applying their writing skills in curriculum subjects, such as history and geography. In key stage 2, pupils' use of complex vocabulary and editing skills are well developed. Their use of punctuation, grammar and spelling skills are, however, inconsistent. Leaders recognise that further work needs to be done to develop writing skills in both key stages.

- For the second line of enquiry, we agreed to look at the actions that leaders take to increase the proportion of pupils attaining the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stages 1 and 2.
- The school has worked in close partnership with the local authority and its federation school to raise standards in reading. Leaders have recently introduced a range of new initiatives and programmes to develop reading and higher comprehension skills in key stage 2. All classes have access to a new library and high-quality books. Reading records are well maintained, and encourage pupils to read in depth. Staff training has been provided for teachers and support staff to develop their skills in the teaching of reading. You recognise that more needs to be done to continue to raise standards in reading and to develop pupils' comprehension skills in Years 5 and 6.
- Pupils' assessment and progress information is used to plan targeted interventions for the most able pupils in writing. A new curriculum for writing is being implemented across the school, and standards are closely monitored by teachers and leaders.
- Attainment and progress in mathematics has been higher in previous years than in reading and writing. This is also the case for the most able pupils. You carefully analysed reasons for the dip in the most recent pupil information, and identified the need to strengthen pupils' reasoning skills. In Years 5 and 6, pupils are working on complex problem-solving questions about decimals and place value. Pupils were eager to explain their mathematical reasoning and enjoyed the increasingly complex challenges presented to them. Pupils we spoke to were keen to demonstrate their reasoning and problem-solving skills.
- Finally we looked at pupils' attendance and persistent absence rates. We agreed to examine this area because for the last three years, rates of absence and persistent absence were above national averages. This was the case for a wide variety of pupils and groups in the school.
- The school has taken a rigorous approach to improve attendance. Records seen show that the school knows individual families very well. Attendance records are carefully monitored and reviewed by leaders. The school has adopted a range of rewards and sanctions, which includes a merit system, class rewards and recognition in assemblies. Families whose children's attendance is a cause for concern are invited in to discuss appropriate support, and are informed about possible consequences for non-attendance. As a result, attendance has risen sharply in the last academic year and is now broadly in line with the national average.
- Current information shows that persistent absence is lower than in previous years. Nonetheless, it is still above the national average, and further work needs to be done to address this.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- writing and comprehension skills are further developed so that more pupils attain the higher standards at the end of key stages 1 and 2, in reading and writing.
- the persistent absence rate continues to decline so that 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 Southwark. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sean Flood
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held discussions with you and other senior and middle leaders. I spoke with a representative from the local authority, and held a meeting with three governors, including the chair of governors. I spoke with pupils in class, in structured settings and informally. I also spoke to parents. I observed pupils' behaviour in class, in the playgrounds and as they moved around the school. I scrutinised pupils' work in a wide range of subjects. I heard readers across the school and spoke with pupils about the books they are reading. I also visited the Nursery. I made visits to all classes alongside senior leaders. I examined the school's progress tracking information and assessment records. I scrutinised a wide range of documentation related to safeguarding, welfare and attendance. I looked at behaviour and bullying incident logs. I considered the responses of 20 parents to Parent View, and the responses of pupils and staff to Ofsted's online surveys.