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Mr Peter Lambillion-Jameson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Lambillion-Jameson

### **Short inspection of Earl Soham Community Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 28 March 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 March 2012.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

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

Earl Soham is a small school where each pupil is recognised and valued as an individual. Pupils told me that this a school where 'everyone is special at something'. Since becoming the substantive headteacher, you have worked effectively with staff to create this ethos where pupils are taken care of and also encouraged to be the best they can be. You, staff and governors alike are determined to ensure that pupils enjoy their learning, make good progress and are well prepared for the future. Together you have addressed the recommendations of the previous inspection, ensuring that the school's mixed-age classes continue to meet pupils' needs, especially in English and mathematics.

Children enjoy a good start to school in the well-organised and attractive Reception/Year 1 class and make good progress from their starting points. Reception-aged children are given plenty of opportunities to work independently, both inside the classroom and outside in the well-resourced outdoor area. Adults provide a broad range of engaging activities, which children enjoy. Children in the Reception Year benefit from being in a mixed-age class because the Year 1 pupils in this class act as role models for the younger children and flexible groupings are used to cater for all pupils' needs.

Teaching across the school is good, especially in English and mathematics because in these subjects, in particular, teachers plan work carefully to meet pupils' individual needs. This was an area for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. Teachers ensure that lessons interest and enthuse pupils, often linking together different areas of learning. For example, in the Year 4, 5, 6 class, pupils were looking at parts of insects in science and, in an art lesson, they created detailed chalk drawings of individual insects, illustrating the body parts.

Additional adults support learning well in all classes because teachers and teaching assistants work effectively together. For example, sometimes the teacher and teaching assistant swap roles, so that the teaching assistant leads the introduction to a lesson while the teacher asks questions and checks pupils' learning. Consequently, pupils respect and respond to all adults equally.

Pupils behave well in school. They told me that younger and older pupils play together frequently and enjoy supporting each other. Pupils listen to adults and to each other respectfully in lessons. They are confident in talking about their learning and enjoy working together in pairs and groups. Pupils told me that they enjoy their lessons and so want to come to school. They enjoy an interesting curriculum, enhanced by opportunities such as visits, music lessons and a wide range of clubs, including dance, film club and ukulele. They take on responsibilities, such as being part of the 'eco club' and 'the green gang', who look after the environment, and as school council leaders, who identify ways to improve the school further.

Typical of the comments made by parents was one who said, 'My children bounce into school every morning and come out smiling every afternoon.' As a result of this enthusiasm, attendance at the school is good for the vast majority of pupils. Pupils are supported in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They learn about other cultures and faiths and know, as one pupil told me, 'We are all different, but also the same, and everyone should be respected.'

Governors provide good support and challenge for leaders. They know the school well; they visit frequently and meet in their committees and as a full governing body to look in detail at aspects of the school's performance. They question you, for example, about your predictions for pupil outcomes, challenging you where these are lower about the reasons why this might be. They know how funding is used, such as for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and understand where funding is best used and has most impact.

A very small number of parents responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire. Those that did respond were very positive about the school and the support provided by all staff for their children. A number of parents praised the school's nurturing environment and echoed the views of pupils who told me that 'We're like an extended family'.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

You ensure that keeping pupils safe has a high priority in the school. Checks on staff are carried out and recorded appropriately. You and the governor responsible for safeguarding check these records regularly to ensure that nothing has been missed. Files for pupils about whom there are concerns are well maintained. Concerns by staff are recorded appropriately and demonstrate that staff know what to look for that may indicate a child is at risk. This is because staff training is carried out regularly. Concerns are also followed up appropriately with outside agencies when necessary.

Pupils know about how to keep themselves safe. They say that school is a safe place. They know about safety online because they are taught about this regularly and were able to tell me about the potential dangers of using technology, and how to minimise these. Pupils say that bullying 'rarely happens here' and that any problems or arguments between pupils are minor and quickly sorted out.

## **Inspection findings**

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed that I would look specifically at the progress that pupils are making in writing. This is because in 2016, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in writing in both Year 2 and Year 6 was below that found nationally. We discussed the fact that the low pupil numbers in each cohort mean there is sometimes a wide fluctuation in outcomes. However, you recognise that writing standards had been lower in Year 2 in previous years than those in reading and mathematics.
- You and your team had already identified improving writing as a priority and had implemented a number of changes which are proving to be effective. As a result, pupils are now making good progress in their writing.
- You identified that some pupils lacked motivation for writing. As a result, you altered your curriculum plans so that there are more opportunities for purposeful writing which better engage pupils. For example, pupils' books showed diary writing linked to research about Charles Darwin, and pupils told me about the writing they had done following a visit to Framlingham Castle. However, these opportunities for writing are not always as well used as they should be. For example, pupils' writing in science is sometimes not at the same standard that they demonstrate in their English work.
- You have begun to implement changes to the teaching of handwriting to improve pupils' fluency. This is having a positive impact on the presentation of pupils' written work.
- Teachers provide pupils with individual targets which identify the specific areas that pupils need to work on during their writing. This is helping individual pupils to understand well what they need to do to improve their work.
- You have also provided additional support for the most able writers. For example, you have set up a 'writer's group' which gives the most able pupils in key stage 2

opportunities to extend and develop their writing further.

- Despite the changes you have implemented, some pupils' spelling is weak and this impairs the quality of their work. Some teachers do not regularly address errors in spelling or insist on pupils accurately spelling words that they are capable of, whenever they write.
- A second area we agreed that I would look at in detail during the inspection was how well the needs of groups of pupils are met, such as those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, those who are disadvantaged and the most able pupils. This was because the numbers of pupils are very small and vary over time, so I wanted to check that these pupils are making good progress. Providing different levels of challenge and support in the mixed-age classes was an area for improvement identified in the previous inspection report.
- All classes have mixed ages of pupils, and teachers are skilled at planning for learning in English and mathematics that meets the range of needs in their class. This includes extending the most able pupils. For example, the most able pupils in Year 6 are given opportunities in mathematics to apply and extend their knowledge through problem solving. In English, teachers have high expectations of the most able pupils and pupils respond accordingly. However, in some subjects, such as science, there are few opportunities for the most able pupils to extend their skills.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have their needs well met because adults carefully plan for their learning. Work is modified for pupils who need it and appropriate support provided through additional resources or adult intervention. Teaching assistants who provide additional support for pupils, within lessons and in small groups, do so well. They carefully question pupils to probe their understanding, and help them develop their ability to tackle tasks independently. As a result, these pupils make good progress from their individual starting points.
- The leader for special educational needs is new in post. She supports teachers and teaching assistants well in understanding the additional support individual pupils may need. She has ensured that there are systems for evaluating the impact of additional support provided but recognises that she has yet to take more of a role in checking provision for identified pupils within classes.
- Most disadvantaged pupils are making good progress because pupil premium funding is used well to provide appropriate support. However, a small number of disadvantaged pupils are not making the accelerated progress that is needed to enable them to reach the standard expected for their age. This is because support has not always been provided soon enough to help them catch up.
- The third area that we agreed to look at in detail during the inspection was the impact that you and other leaders have had in maintaining and improving the quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection. This was because there have been a number of changes of staff and some dips in pupil outcomes.
- I looked at the checks that you carry out on teaching and found that these are thorough and regular. They include lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils'

work. You provide helpful and accurate feedback to teachers. You clearly identify where improvements need to be made and follow up on these areas in subsequent observations. You provide support for any teacher where this is needed.

- You check the progress that pupils are making through pupil progress meetings. You talk with teachers to analyse the outcomes of pupil assessments and to identify what else can be done to ensure that individual pupils are making the progress they are capable of making.
- You have made links with other schools so that teachers can compare their assessments of pupils with those of others, as well as checking with each other in school, so that you know that they are accurate.
- You acknowledge that since your appointment, most of these checks have been carried out by you in your role as headteacher and also mathematics subject leader. You are aware that other subject leaders are knowledgeable about their subjects and able to provide good support for each other informally. However, they are yet to fully develop their roles in driving improvement and in checking the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide better support for pupils in improving their spelling, so that the quality of writing improves further
- opportunities for writing across the curriculum are well used in all classes and subjects
- subject leaders play a greater role in improving the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects and in ensuring that all pupils' needs are met, including those of the most able
- support for some disadvantaged pupils is provided sooner, so that they make accelerated progress and are enabled to reach the standard expected for their age.

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

Yours sincerely

Maria Curry  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, with subject leaders and with two governors. I met with a group of pupils from Years 4, 5 and 6. I scrutinised a range of documents, including information on pupils' progress, safeguarding, development planning and the school's self-evaluation. I visited all classes and evaluated pupils' work. I checked the school's website and found it to meet requirements on the publication of specified information.