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Mrs Sarah Hurwood
Headteacher
Epping Upland Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs Hurwood

Short inspection of Epping Upland Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 October 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 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

You and your leadership team provide clear leadership and are dedicated to the pupils and the community. This provides a strong sense of purpose which motivates staff and pupils to achieve well. Parents and staff alike recognise the high quality of leadership in your school. There is a strong sense of teamwork and high morale among staff.

You and your staff have created a warm and welcoming school where all pupils' academic and personal development are equally important. Your staff know pupils and their families well. This, together with the high priority given to supporting pupils' personal development and welfare, continues to be a key strength of your school. Parents are overwhelmingly positive and expressed appreciation for the support given to their children. Pupils and staff have very positive relationships. Pupils enjoy coming to school and say that 'there is nothing the teachers wouldn't do for us.'

During the previous inspection, many strengths were identified in your school: the good start that children make in the Reception class; the good provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities; and the knowledge and

commitment to improvement demonstrated by your governors. These remain strengths.

Since the previous inspection, leaders and teachers have developed mathematics teaching further so that it is now a significant strength. Pupils make rapid progress in mathematics and therefore achieve well above average expectations by the time they leave your school.

You continue to ensure that a topic-based curriculum, together with a range of high-quality enrichment experiences, keeps your pupils interested and motivated. For example, pupils studying the Romans researched designs for sandals and then created their own centurion's footwear. Year 6 pupils researched the science behind why birds fly into glass and, as a result of their findings, designed window coverings aimed at preventing this happening at the school.

Pupils are extremely polite and well mannered. Pupils are keen to contribute to their school. For example, some pupils talked about their responsibilities within their classes and Year 6 pupils are keen to be reading or mathematics ambassadors. Pupils are articulate and express their views and opinions confidently. They listen well and respect other people's ideas. Pupils spoke with maturity about resolving disagreements and supporting others. Their attitudes to learning are highly positive, as can be seen in their willingness to work together, their diligence in class and the good quality of presentation in books and displays.

Safeguarding is effective.

All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You ensure that all necessary checks are made on all staff prior to taking up appointments. Records are complete and up to date. Staff and governors undertake regular and relevant training. Any concerns about pupils are raised immediately. You hold regular meetings to share any concerns regarding pupils and this ensures that nothing is overlooked. Although rare, when there has been the need, staff have worked closely with other professionals, such as health and family support, to make sure that pupils are safe and well supported. The well-being mentor is well respected within the community and her work is invaluable in engaging in early support.

Pupils report feeling very safe in your school. They have a good awareness of when they may be at risk in a range of situations and how to manage this effectively. Pupils relate this to when they are using the internet and know who to speak to if they are concerned. Parents are confident that their children are well looked after. Parents who responded to the Parent View questionnaire overwhelmingly agreed that their children are safe at school.

Inspection findings

- My first key line of enquiry was about teachers providing more challenge for most-able pupils. This was an area for improvement in the previous inspection. Leaders have worked hard to address this. Teachers now check the progress of

all pupils, including the most able pupils, to ensure that they make good progress.

- Leaders have been flexible with the curriculum and timetable organisation, allowing the most able pupils to work in classes above their year group to ensure challenge in the subjects in which they excel.
- Half-termly 'Free Fridays' extend topic work into creative cross-curricular projects which interest pupils. This provides most-able pupils with the chance to tackle challenging activities, for example designing, planning and renovating a garden area of the school.
- The member of staff with responsibility for identifying and championing the academically most able pupils, and also pupils with talents in all other areas of the curriculum, ensures a wide range of opportunities for gifted, talented and most-able pupils. Some pupils attend secondary school mathematics and science classes, a local provider offers a dedicated most-able science day and pupils can visit a chamber orchestra, study archaeology or compete in art and public speaking competitions. Good use is made of local consortium and partnership events that are aimed at the most able pupils.
- All staff have received training on how to provide challenge to the most able. The impact of this was evident in all lessons visited, where tasks, questions and groups were well matched to the different needs of pupils. Teaching assistants work well with small groups of pupils.
- Challenge for the most able was also seen in the early years where the most able children were writing words such as 'fox', 'man' and 'girl' on a class mural.
- Work in pupils' books showed clearly that the most able pupils are producing a high standard of work. Teachers' comments in books frequently suggested ways to extend pupils' learning. However, the work is not systematically planned for foundation subjects.
- School assessment information presently shows that the most able pupils are currently making good progress in all year groups and subjects, as was also the case in 2016.
- My second line of enquiry concerned whether leaders are doing all that they can to improve the attendance of pupils. This was because, based on the 2015/16 attendance figures, attendance was among the lowest nationally. Persistent absence has also been higher than it should be for some time.
- On examining the school systems and processes, I concluded that the school has a thorough and systematic approach to monitoring attendance and is doing all that it can to encourage good attendance.
- The well-being mentor has worked with families to support them to improve the attendance of their children. When pupils miss school, arrangements are put in place to combat the adverse effects of missing school time.
- Leaders identified that lateness was having an adverse effect on pupils' learning, particularly for those missing morning reading sessions. As a result of the actions taken, punctuality has improved. Governors have rigorously challenged leaders

on this issue and leaders talk to parents about the impact of lateness on their child's education.

- The school has been rigorous in its use of the education welfare service and applying penalty notices for non-attendance.
- In my final line of enquiry, I asked whether leaders are taking effective action to improve outcomes in the tests of English grammar, punctuation, spelling and reading and whether they might learn from the successful practice in mathematics to do this. I asked this question because, in 2016, writing standards at the end of Year 6 were at least in line with the national average, while in the grammar, punctuation and spelling test, they were well below the national average.
- Leaders have implemented a number of strategies to improve reading and grammar, punctuation and spelling. In Year 6, because an additional adult is deployed, pupils are taught in smaller groups, which is helping teachers to focus more closely on pupils' exact needs. Governors have allocated additional resources, including better-quality and more interesting books.
- Leaders have introduced a completely new teaching programme for grammar, punctuation and spelling. Teachers are able to check what pupils know so that gaps in their understanding can be addressed. Some pupils are also undertaking specialist learning using similar methods to those used successfully in mathematics, which is improving their spelling skills.
- The literacy leader has produced recommended reading lists for every class, aimed at widening the range of books pupils read. This helps pupils to develop their vocabulary. Pupils' vocabulary is developed very well by some teachers but not by others. Leaders are aware that this remains a priority.
- Whole-staff training has improved staff knowledge and teaching expertise in literacy. Teachers have worked with other local schools to share good practice. Work now starts much earlier to ensure that excellent early reading outcomes are built upon. Teachers work on grammar, punctuation and spelling skills in all their subjects and offer feedback on this. However, there is not a consistent approach to teaching and correcting spelling. Pupils' responses to teachers' comments are not always helpful. There is a lack of follow-up in line with the school's marking policy, so errors remain.
- There has been an increased focus on making reading fun and involving parents. Staff read aloud to their classes to encourage enjoyment of books. The school has regular events, such as Roald Dahl Day and competitions, to interest pupils. The school has numerous lively displays and offers incentives for reading, such as stickers and badges. The 'pupil reading ambassadors', elected to mirror those of mathematics, are held in high regard. Parents commented that they had noticed a greater emphasis on reading.
- As a result of the actions taken, pupils read well, say they enjoy reading and read regularly, often choosing challenging books, which could be seen in their home-school reading journals. Pupils in upper key stage 2 have instigated their own reading circles which take place at lunchtimes. They choose their own books and set their own reading targets and discussion topics. A significant number of pupils

are now taking part in this. Reading progress across the school is good, based on school assessment information which suggests that the improvements are set to continue.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- assessment of foundation subjects improves, so that work is systematically planned to challenge pupils of all abilities, particularly the most able
- a consistent approach to the teaching and correction of spelling is adopted, in line with the school's marking policy
- teachers share good practice regarding developing pupils' vocabulary.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Sutton
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your leadership team, some teachers and support staff, parents, three governors and pupils. I spoke with a representative of the local authority by telephone.

I visited all the classrooms and looked at pupils' work. I observed behaviour around the school.

I reviewed records of monitoring teaching and learning, the single central record of employment checks, child protection systems, risk assessments, governing body information, the school website, pupils' assessment and progress information, attendance information and the school self-evaluation and improvement plan.

I took account of the 55 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, 49 text messages from parents, one letter from a parent and the school's recent staff survey.