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Mrs Joanna Di-Bella
Headteacher
Birchwood Avenue Primary School
Birchwood Avenue
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Hertfordshire
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Dear Mrs Di-Bella

Short inspection of Birchwood Avenue Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 December 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 reflect on what is going well and what could be better. You actively and effectively seek to continually improve the education you provide. The quality of teaching across the school is consistently good. The work which pupils complete is varied and interesting. It meets the pupils' needs well. As a result, pupils throughout the school make good progress.

Developments in teaching are underpinned by the stability of staffing in the school. You have been highly successful in maintaining high levels of staff morale. All staff who responded to Ofsted's online survey said that they enjoy working at the school and that they are well supported. They are proud to work there. Staff feel that you help them to develop professionally and that you consider their needs. Consequently, your chosen methods of improving teaching and maintaining the good quality of education in the school are secured and effective.

Pupils' behaviour is a strength of the school. Pupils respond well to the way adults work with them. They are calm as well as enthusiastic to learn. Pupils are keen to be involved in learning and demonstrate positive attitudes which help them to develop their skills and understanding. They are confident and readily volunteer to answer questions. Pupils are unafraid to test their ideas in front of their peers. They listen well and are respectful of the views of others. Pupils I spoke with told me that it is okay to be different and to 'be yourself'. The school environment is highly conducive to learning.

Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. When they identify an area for improvement they take effective action to make things better. For example, governors commissioned reviews of the early years and of provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. This led to improvements in what leaders do. Governors support you well in developing the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

You are committed to the well-being of pupils. You have established clear procedures for staff reporting concerns to you about children. You also encourage children to share concerns directly with you. You place strong relationships at the heart of your work on keeping children safe and you work closely with parents to help them keep their children safe. Pupils feel safe and they said that you deal with bullying well. Pupils I spoke with were able to tell me about how to stay safe online and about not talking to strangers. Your work to keep pupils safe is effective.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry to establish if the school remains good was about the progress made by boys in key stage 1. Published outcomes for the school indicate that boys' attainment at key stage 1 was much lower than that of girls in 2017.
- The starting points of boys in the school are generally lower than those of girls. Boys are well supported by good teaching. Boys and girls in key stage 1 are confident to express their ideas and to join in with lessons. Teachers make sure that the work pupils do is well matched to their abilities. Pupils from all starting points build on what they already know and can do. In a range of subjects, including in mathematics and English, boys make good progress from their starting points.
- My second line of enquiry related to the progress pupils make in writing. In 2017, pupils made progress in writing at key stage 2 which was broadly similar to that of other pupils nationally. However, over time, pupils have not made the same strong progress in writing at key stage 2 that they have in reading and mathematics. In addition, attainment in writing at key stage 1 in 2017 was low.
- You provide pupils with a wide range of opportunities to write. They benefit from structured writing tasks and from many chances to produce extended writing. You ensure that pupils write about a range of topics such as democracy, the Romans and evolution. You ensure that pupils' spelling is regularly tested and you expand their understanding of words with extended vocabulary challenges. You provide 'booster' classes to make sure pupils' writing develops well and you maintain high-quality writing-assessment books which show what pupils have achieved. Pupils across the school make good progress in writing.
- My final line of enquiry was about attendance. Over time, attendance at the school has been low. You have worked hard to improve this. You challenge poor, and celebrate good, attendance. You track absence closely and understand the reasons different pupils are away from school. You have been successful in

improving attendance, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. However, you recognise that there is still more to do to reduce the amount of time pupils miss from school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they build on their good work to support boys, so that boys' progress is accelerated
- they continue to improve the attendance of pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Andy Hemmings
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with school leaders and four governors. I visited all classes, accompanied by school leaders, and reviewed pupils' work in their books.

I looked at performance information and reviewed a range of documentation relating to the school's self-evaluation, development planning, safeguarding arrangements, governance and analysis of the spending of pupil premium and physical education and sports funding.

I considered the four written responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 19 responses to the staff survey. There were no responses to the pupil survey. I met with pupils from each year group as well as listening to pupils read.