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Mrs Helen Shaw
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Shaw

Short inspection of Elmwood Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 March 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 February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Achievement continues to be strong and improving in early years. In 2017, key stage 1 attainment in reading was above national averages and in the highest 10% of schools nationally. In addition, attainment for the most able pupils in Year 6 was in the top 10% of schools nationally in reading, writing and mathematics.

Elmwood Primary is a nurturing, welcoming school. Your commitment to pupil well-being is demonstrated through the effective transition arrangements that are in place to meet the individual needs of children, particularly those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, before they start at Elmwood. As a result, children get a good start to their full-time education, make good progress and almost all children achieve a good level of development by the time they leave Reception.

Parents are positive about the good standard of education their children receive at your school. It is testament to you and your leaders' good work that the numbers of pupils have increased and this year the school has become many parents' first preference, with some families making the journey to school from outside the school's immediate local area. Parents are very supportive of your leadership. One parent commented: 'Elmwood is a fantastic school where the whole child is considered. The school strikes a balance between preparing for the next steps and providing fun, engaging learning opportunities,' while another added, 'I cannot

recommend our school highly enough.' This was further evidenced in Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, where all parents said that they would recommend Elmwood to other parents. Parental commitment and support is further evidenced through the work of the school's parent and teacher association, which raises a significant amount of money to improve the school's resources.

You and your team were disappointed with the end of key stage 2 attainment in the combined results for reading, writing and mathematics, which was below the national average at the end of 2017. In addition, not all pupils made the progress that they should have from the end of key stage 1 to when they leave at the end of Year 6.

You and your leaders have quickly identified important aspects of teaching and learning which needed strengthening. Subject leaders for English and mathematics provided sufficient evidence to show that outcomes for current pupils across the school are strong and that leaders' swift actions are having a positive impact on improving standards in key stage 2.

Governors demonstrate good knowledge and can talk about their plans for the future of Elmwood. However, they acknowledge that they need to check regularly leaders' work on the progress for different pupil groups, particularly disadvantaged pupils and the most able.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Checks on all employees' suitability to work with children are complete. Your systems for recording pupils' concerns are effective and are shared easily and quickly with those who need to know.

Behaviour logs show that few recent serious incidents have been recorded and where they have been, secure systems ensure that they are followed up immediately and appropriate actions taken. The pastoral care you provide is very strong at Elmwood. You have developed good relationships with families and work well with external agencies to ensure that families get the help and support that they need. Parents value your involvement and the support that you personally provide. One parent's view was echoed by many, saying, 'The school is so nurturing, I feel comfortable that they are safe, happy and well cared for,' while another added: 'The head is exceptional, she knows all the children and parents and takes the time to listen to them. She has also taken the time to be personally involved.'

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was to look at how you and your leaders are raising achievement across key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. This was because progress for some pupils appeared to dip in 2017, particularly in reading and mathematics.

- You, your senior leaders and the leader of reading have wasted no time in addressing issues and have conducted an analysis to identify areas where pupils typically struggled in the end-of-year tests. The complexity of some of the longer questions, pupils' understanding of some vocabulary and the speed and skills required to complete the longer questions were some of the areas identified as challenges for pupils last year.
- You recognised that further developing your teaching team was a priority in order to raise attainment in key stage 2. You have put into place a number of measures to ensure that leaders' actions improve progress for current pupils.
- Experienced leaders support teachers by working alongside them to ensure consistency in the quality of teaching and learning across the school. The introduction of reading journeys has helped teachers to focus on developing pupils' key reading skills, such as sequencing, retrieval and prediction skills. Pupils' work, in Year 5, demonstrated pupils' ability to find relevant and factual information connected to their topic on Jamaica.
- Your 'teachers as readers' strategy has effectively developed teachers' subject knowledge so that they are able to introduce pupils to a wide range of high-quality texts. In addition, pupils have studied the plays of Shakespeare, as well as novels by Charles Dickens.
- Your speediness at addressing the challenges that pupils experienced last year in reading has had a positive result on improving standards. Current information on pupils' progress indicates that more pupils are on track to meet expected standards in reading, this year, and make the good and better progress of which they are capable.
- Your leader of mathematics was able to show evidence in current pupils' work to show that developing pupils' fluency skills has been a school priority. You identified that a number of pupils missed meeting the expected standard at the end of Year 6 in 2017 by just a very few marks. You have ensured that there is a consistency in teaching methods across the school and an urgency to fill any gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills.
- One way you have achieved this is by setting pupils tasks which show the gaps in their learning. For example, pupils' books showed pupils attempting a 'cold' mathematical task to assess where the pupils are in their learning. Teachers then teach to the individual needs and fill the gaps in pupils' knowledge and teach the relevant skills. The task is then attempted again in a different context. Teachers then immediately assess the progress that pupils make and plan their next steps in learning accordingly.
- Leaders have used external research, for example from Singapore, to identify strategies to deepen pupils' mathematical understanding. This has meant that the proportion of pupils who reach the higher standards in mathematics is in line with national averages.
- It was evident that current pupils are making good progress in reading and mathematics, including the most able and those who are disadvantaged. However, in order for more pupils to reach the national expected standards, you and your leaders agree that occasionally pupils could be moved on to more

challenging work earlier.

- My final area of inspection was about increasing progress in writing by ensuring that pupils have opportunities to practise their writing skills in subjects other than English. This was highlighted as an area for development in the previous inspection.
- You offer pupils an exciting and broad curriculum which provides many opportunities for writing. You introduce pupils to their new topic each term through 'wow' activities which ignite pupils' interest and enthusiasm. For example, at the start of the new term, Year 6 pupils were presented with a mock murder mystery scene at the start of their topic on crime and punishment.
- In the early years children were totally immersed in their topic on Jack and the beanstalk. Children were independently writing letters to invite Jack to a party. Children were also writing on behalf of the giant, asking for the return of his hen.
- They excitedly answered questions about key points in the story and showed how they remembered the sequence using storyboard drawings from whole-class work. This strategy has helped to develop children's vocabulary and confidence as well as their writing skills as seen in the lesson, where they chose to write sentences independently, remembering to use capital letters and full stops correctly.
- Year 5 work on the Caribbean demonstrated that pupils are given many opportunities for writing for different purposes. Their ability to discuss and debate significant aspects about Jamaica's economy was transferred into their writing books. In Year 2, pupils wrote to Christopher Columbus asking for a job as a sailor on board his ship. They used their factual knowledge when writing a letter home, sharing experiences such as 'eating salty fish'. The focus on characterisation and writing from a different perspective develops across the year groups.
- Year 6 writing showed that pupils can vary their sentence starters, use short sentences to create atmosphere and immerse themselves in a character to write from different viewpoints. Pupils with low starting points, including those who are disadvantaged, use writing techniques exceptionally well to create impact and to engage and interest the reader. There was much evidence to show that pupils make good progress across all year groups in writing.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- governors routinely challenge school leaders about their work to raise achievement for pupils, particularly the most able pupils and those who are disadvantaged
- all teachers use what they already know about pupils to move learning on quickly from the start of the lesson and during the lesson in writing and mathematics.

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

published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Cindy Impey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

We discussed the lines of enquiry for this inspection, areas for further improvement and information about current pupils' attainment and progress. I visited all year groups and held meetings with you, as the headteacher, senior leaders, members of the governing board and a representative from the local authority. I spoke with pupils informally and I also spoke with a number of parents at the beginning of the school day. I examined policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils and read the minutes of governors' meetings. I gathered a range of evidence to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning and assessment; this included joint meetings with you, your deputy headteacher and subject leaders of English and mathematics. I looked at a range of pupils' work from across all year groups, subjects and a wide range of abilities. The views of 86 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account, as well as 83 responses that parents made using the free-text service.