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Mrs Sarah Sprack
Head of Isle Education Trust
Epworth Primary Academy
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Dear Mrs Sprack

Short inspection of Epworth Primary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 28 February 2019, 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 December 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You communicate your expectations effectively and have built a committed team of staff who share your vision and ambition for pupils. Your self-evaluation provides an honest and realistic analysis of the school. You have identified areas for improvement within the school development plan, which provides a focus for improving outcomes for pupils. As a result, Epworth Academy is an improving school.

The school has gone through a period of significant turbulence in leadership and staffing since the last inspection. This has had a detrimental effect on the quality of teaching and the standards pupils achieve. You have acted decisively to address these issues and, as head of trust, you are creating stability within the school as it moves forward. As a result, teaching is much stronger and pupils currently in the school are making good progress.

Your efforts to build leadership capacity and improve the quality of teaching across the school have been largely successful, though there is still further work to be done. Your leadership team share your ambition and they work closely with you to improve teaching and learning. However, several leaders are new to their roles and their leadership skills need further development in order for them to fulfil their responsibilities effectively.

You ensure that your governors and trustees receive accurate and detailed

information. As a result, they are well informed and have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Governors and trustees hold high expectations of all pupils and staff and offer you effective strategic support and challenge.

Evidence shows that you have had some success in addressing the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. Learning activities, particularly for mathematics, are appropriately challenging and closely match the needs of pupils. Pupils confidently assess for themselves how well they are achieving in lessons and how they can improve further. You have also introduced regular opportunities for teachers to observe each other's practice so that strong provision is celebrated and shared.

In the 2018 national tests, you, your leaders and governors were disappointed with the progress pupils made in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2. However, you have been resolute in addressing this. Evidence collected during the inspection clearly identifies the good progress current pupils are making and the good standards they are attaining in these subjects.

You were also disappointed with the significant decline in the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in the phonics screening check in 2018, especially as standards had been very high in previous years. Although there are valid reasons as to why they have declined, inspection evidence suggests that there are occasions when phonics teaching is not consistently strong in key stage 1.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The designated safeguarding leaders, and all other staff, are well trained. They receive regular updates, which help to ensure that safeguarding remains at the forefront of everyone's mind. Record-keeping is detailed and well maintained. When necessary, appropriate actions are taken in a timely manner. Support for vulnerable families is strong. Your procedures for recruiting, vetting and checking staff are thorough.

You work effectively with external agencies to ensure that everything is being done to safeguard children and minimise risk. Parents are confident that their children are safe and well cared for at the school.

Inspection findings

- Adults and pupils work well together in a calm and purposeful environment. Pupils behave very well and they have excellent attitudes to learning. Pupils are self-assured learners and take ownership of their own learning. They confidently assess how well they are doing and aspire to achieve the more demanding work that is set during lessons.
- The decline in outcomes that the school has experienced in key stage 2 is not reflected in the work of current pupils. This is because you and your leaders have

been determined to rapidly improve the quality of teaching. You have instilled a culture of high expectations, which is clearly evident in all classes, and an environment where teachers can confidently share expertise and learn from each other. The teaching I observed with your leaders, and the pupils' work that we looked at, indicates that current pupils are making good progress, and attaining higher standards than previously, in reading, writing and mathematics.

- In mathematics, pupils of different abilities, and from different starting points, are completing challenging activities that deepen their understanding of what they are learning. You and your leaders have implemented appropriate strategies in lessons, such as 'marking stations' and 'pupil experts', which promote pupils' independence in their learning and enable them to challenge themselves further.
- Pupils read texts that are suitable for their age. Workbooks show that pupils learn relevant skills that enable them to explore these texts in depth. Older pupils who read to me were confident and fluent, and could use higher-order reading skills, such as inference, to express opinion and explain meaning in a text.
- Leaders have placed a strong emphasis on improving the teaching of writing across the school, especially for pupils who are capable of attaining the higher standards. The most able pupils currently in the school apply their spelling, punctuation and grammar skills with accuracy, and choose adventurous vocabulary to make their writing more interesting to read.
- In phonics lessons that we observed in key stage 1, teachers take opportunities to explain that sounds can be made with different groups of letters, and this helps children read simple and unfamiliar words. Activities are mostly chosen well to keep pupils interested and engaged, and as a result the majority of pupils are making secure progress. However, a minority of pupils are not making the progress of which they are capable because the learning activities they are engaged in do not consistently meet their needs.
- You have brought stability to the school following a period of uncertainty. At this point, however, leadership responsibilities are not fully shared, and this, consequently, slows the pace of school improvement. Recently appointed leaders are keen to take on these responsibilities once they have developed the skills and knowledge necessary to contribute to the school's improvement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the skills of leaders are extended so that they are better able to influence the quality of teaching and learning across a range of subjects
- good practice in the teaching of phonics is firmly embedded across all groups.

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

Yours sincerely

Alan Chaffey
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the assistant principals of the school and subject leaders for English and mathematics. I also met with three members of the governing body and a trustee of the multi-academy trust. I spoke with pupils during lessons and when listening to them read. I visited classes in key stages 1 and 2. I scrutinised various documents, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans and safeguarding documents. I considered the 12 responses to the staff survey, the 67 responses to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, Parent View, and 31 free-text responses to Parent View.