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Mr Stuart Roberts
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Roberts

Short inspection of Ellesmere Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 9 July 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 predecessor school was judged to be good in May 2016.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment in January 2018, you have set about tackling directly those relative weaknesses that you and others have identified. Both the school's written self-evaluation and our discussions show that you are perceptive and balanced in your appraisal of the school. You have a clear view of the priorities for further improvement, and a determination to achieve the very best for the pupils.

Senior leaders have created a strong sense of teamwork in the school. Staff understand the school's expectations and ambitions. You give careful consideration to how individual members of staff can be best deployed. Staff recognise that leaders and governors have paid appropriate regard to their workload and well-being.

The school joined the North West Academies Trust, a multi-academy trust comprised of schools largely situated in Cheshire, in September 2016. Membership of the trust has brought the school significant benefits. The trust has facilitated the acquisition of sizeable grants to improve the fabric of the school. Staff are able to visit other schools to learn from strong practice and to check that their judgements about pupils' achievements are in line with those of others. Specialists employed by the trust provide support on specific issues. Pupils enjoy the opportunity to take part in sporting competitions with other schools. At the same time, you also make good use of advice from outside the trust.

The enjoyment of sport and physical exercise (PE) is an important feature of the school. On the day of the inspection, trainers were teaching every class, in rotation, how to skip. Pupils have weekly swimming lessons in the pool owned by the school. A high proportion of pupils take part in the rich programme of extra-curricular sport. The school has achieved the Gold Schools Games Mark.

Pupils' behaviour is good, both at social times and during lessons. Pupils told me that the recent adoption of a clearer system of rewards and sanctions has improved conduct this academic year. Importantly, pupils enjoy being in the classroom, and appreciate the variety in their curriculum. Their constructive attitudes to learning are well developed. For example, in a Year 2 lesson that we observed, pupils set about their mathematical investigation with a real sense of purpose. They collaborate well with their peers when asked to do so. Pupils care about their work, and generally present it well.

Pupils have good opportunities to take up responsibilities. They can support younger pupils or act as monitors. Those pupils I spoke with understand the role of the school council, and believe it has been effective in contributing to school policy. You consult regularly with pupils to glean their views on their learning. Through their work in religious education, pupils are introduced to a range of different traditions. They learn the importance of respecting cultures other than their own. Year 6 pupils feel that the school has prepared them well for the move to secondary school. For example, a teacher from the school to which almost all pupils transfer has taught them French during the current year.

The inspection confirmed your view that teaching is good. Teachers plan work that is well matched to what pupils already know and understand. They provide challenging tasks for the most able pupils and those pupils who complete work more quickly. Teachers question pupils effectively to check on how well they understand new ideas. They provide feedback that pupils generally use well to improve their own work. Teachers use the technical terms associated with each subject correctly. Learning proceeds at a good pace. Pupils and their parents think that homework serves a valuable purpose.

In general, since the school reopened as an academy, pupils' attainment in English and mathematics across the school has been in line with national averages. Outcomes have been more consistent in the younger years than at the end of key stage 2. Inspection evidence shows that current pupils are making strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding at the school. All arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders have made sure that staff are thoroughly trained to identify any problems that pupils may face, and are alert to signs that they may not be safe. The school's records show that when a risk to pupils arises, leaders work effectively with parents to protect children. They involve other agencies when required.

Leaders and governors have assessed the additional risks posed to pupils by current and future building work at the school. They have taken effective steps to ensure that pupils stay safe.

Pupils told me that they feel entirely safe in school. They said that bullying occurs very rarely, if at all. Pupils have confidence in adults to resolve any disputes between pupils or difficulties that arise. Pupils were able to recall in good detail the advice that they have received on how to stay safe online and from a number of other risks.

Inspection findings

- Records show that many children join the early years provision with skills that are below those that are typical for their age. For some children, their communication and language skills are particularly weak. Teachers assess children's individual circumstances and abilities carefully, and plan activities accordingly. Those with low starting points generally catch up quickly, and children make strong progress in the acquisition of skills in all areas of the curriculum. Children end their Reception Year as confident and articulate learners, well prepared for their studies in key stage 1.
- Pupils learn to write in a variety of different styles. Their books show the composition of poetry in different formats, as well as writing based on their studies in other subjects such as history and science. Teachers encourage pupils to make their writing more effective through the conscious choice of a more ambitious vocabulary. Pupils learn how to check on the accuracy of their own writing. Leaders have strengthened the assessment of writing by setting expectations for each year group in key stage 2.
- Pupils and parents told me that leaders have developed a strong reading culture. Pupils read enthusiastically at home and at school. Some older pupils' work shows the effectiveness of a new programme to teach specific reading skills more directly. However, the practice is not yet embedded across key stage 2.
- The teaching of mathematics is effective. Teachers ensure that pupils have a secure basic understanding of number facts and arithmetic relationships. They also encourage pupils to think about how they approach problems, and to explain their reasoning. Pupils know how to use practical equipment to help them to develop a more abstract understanding of new ideas.
- Pupils currently benefit from a broad curriculum, which succeeds in engaging their interest. Educational visits and visitors to the school, such as authors, enrich their experience. Pupils currently achieve well in some foundation subjects, such as science and computing. However, leaders are revising the curriculum to ensure that all subjects receive the proper attention, and that pupils' work always builds on what they have learned before. Teachers have piloted the teaching of 'mini-missions' lasting three or four weeks, and combining the learning of a number of specified subjects. Both the work that pupils have produced and the enthusiasm of both teachers and pupils demonstrate the potential for the new 'missions' to enhance significantly pupils' achievement

across the curriculum.

- During the last academic year, pupils' attendance was below average. Leaders responded by providing high-profile rewards for good attendance, such as the weekly attendance cup. At the same time, they have taken firm action against those parents who remove their children from school for unauthorised holidays. As a result, attendance this academic year has risen to be in line with the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they implement a curriculum that allows pupils to acquire progressively deeper knowledge and skills in all foundation subjects
- teachers embed consistently effective teaching of reading skills in key stage 2.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Shropshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Martin Spoor
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, other leaders, members of the local governing board and the chief executive officer of North West Academies Trust. I observed the teaching of English, mathematics, PE and personal, social, health and economic education jointly with senior leaders. I scrutinised pupils' work from the current academic year. I met with a group of key stage 2 pupils to gather their views, and spoke informally with several more pupils of all ages. I spoke with parents at the start of the school day. I observed pupils' behaviour at social times.

I took account of the 50 recent responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and the 46 free-text responses received during the inspection. I also considered the 26 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. There were too few responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire for me to take these views into account.

I scrutinised a wide range of documents both electronically and on paper, including: the school's evaluation of its own performance and its plans for improvement; records of governors' meetings; the records of visits from an external consultant; and records of pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour. I looked in detail at records that show how the school keeps pupils safe.