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Sue Ferguson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Ferguson

Short inspection of Ellen Wilkinson Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 1 December 2015 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 Ellen Wilkinson School was judged to be good in November 2011.

This school continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection the particular strengths that were identified at that time have been sustained or enhanced to become highly effective features of the school's work. Staff turnover has been low during the last four years because of their commitment to working together and doing the best for the local community. Staff at every level operate cohesively as a team, but they are not complacent. They challenge one another and state their views professionally and openly during consultations about proposed changes or future plans.

The impact of your commitment to develop staff confidence as leaders is significant. During your year's absence the team 'stepped up' to manage the school. This demonstrates a real understanding of their leadership roles but also their strong loyalty to you and to the school during an unsettling time.

Since the last inspection you have improved attendance from average to well above average. Reading is no longer an area for significant development. Pupils told inspectors four years ago that they were opposed to racist behaviour and that discrimination is never tolerated. Pupils expressed the same sentiments to me during this visit. Another area that has been sustained is that staff remain fully committed to the school's further success.

Governors have been reconstituted in the last 18 months. The new chair and vice-chair of governors have shown strong leadership to radically overhaul how they function as a governing body. They have higher expectations of you and your team

than previously, holding you to account strongly for school improvement. Leaders respond to this expectation, thereby promoting a challenging partnership with governors which has pupils' well-being and achievement at its core.

These highly effective elements are the foundations upon which to now insist on greater challenge in the classroom. This leadership drive in conjunction with further developing marking and assessment are already accurately identified as key priorities in the current school strategic plan. This plan, however, is for one year only. It does not consider how to identify or work towards longer-term goals.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are robust and kept continually under review by leaders and governors.

Safeguarding has the highest priority in school. Pupils, staff, parents and governors are all committed to ensuring that children are as safe as they can be. In school, staff and leaders are vigilant to the different signs indicating that pupils may be at risk. Staff report any concerns they may have about a pupil's welfare, no matter how small, to the designated adults for safeguarding. These concerns are considered robustly and appropriate action is taken. Child protection records and referrals to outside agencies are kept securely and efficiently. You have established a highly effective safeguarding team comprised of senior leaders, attendance and welfare staff as well as external professionals. This team meets regularly to assess and to co-ordinate the support and outcomes of agreed actions undertaken for families in need.

Checks on staff suitability to work with children are equally robust. During staff recruitment interviews, candidates are assessed on their commitment to safeguarding and their understanding about how to keep children safe. During their employment, staff complete additional checks about their ongoing suitability to work in accordance with the required guidance. Staff and governors are well informed about changes in the statutory guidance, *Keeping children safe in education*.

Outside school, links with the local community are equally strong. Staff teams work very closely with all parents, regardless of religious belief, culture or ethnicity, and with members of local faith groups. Leaders and governors insist that its 'Prevent' duties to tackle extremist views are fulfilled unequivocally. For example, the most recent school newsletter alerts parents to the statutory changes in relation to radicalisation, child sexual exploitation and female genital mutilation.

The school actively promotes and celebrates its diversity and shared values of tolerance and respect. Governors and staff believe in these principles passionately, and, supported by the local authority, they tackle any incidents that could compromise this position. This expectation is non-negotiable and provides an additional measure to promote children's safety inside and outside school.

Inspection findings

- You have ensured that the school's aims, 'learning to grow and succeed together', are established throughout the organisation.
- Pupils achieve well from their own starting points. You have developed strong links with different pre-school services including 'Little Ellies' and the school's own children's centre. Staff share information about children's achievement and well-being, which ensures a secure and smooth transition into school.
- Many children enter the nursery with skills below those typically expected for their age, particularly in health, self-care and communication skills. Adults in early years work strongly to address these areas. Progress for many children is good. In 2015, 80% of children made the expected good level of development at the end of Reception, which is 19% higher than average. Senior leaders correctly identify that more children should be exceeding this standard to secure outstanding progress.
- Leaders' focus on phonics (letters and the sounds they make) is successful. A three-year trend shows outcomes to be consistently higher than average. Since the last inspection the school has also worked hard to increase pupils' progress. Senior leaders promote effective strategies to raise expectations in reading and mathematics. Outcomes in these subjects are now in line with and sometimes above average. However, pupils' attainment in writing is not as strong.
- During work scrutiny with you, some books, including some early years learning profiles, show inconsistent progress. Pupils' handwriting and presentation is not as good as it should be. Pupils' writing is, at times, limited in its quality and quantity by the format provided by the adult. Marking with comments such as, 'excellent' or 'capital letters please,' does not guide pupils sufficiently to either enhance or to develop their writing skills. You acknowledge there is more to do to refine assessment and ensure clarity about the next steps in pupils' learning to speed up their progress.
- Teachers initiated 'targeted learning time'. They are released from class duties once every three weeks for short, highly focused teaching sessions for individual pupils. The impact is demonstrable. The attainment gap has now largely closed between disadvantaged pupils and those who speak English as an additional language when compared with others. You rightly identify that the school must now apply the same degree of rigour to challenge higher-attaining pupils in lessons.
- Pupils' attitudes and their behaviour are excellent. They relish opportunities to take responsibility for themselves and their school. This ethic is exemplified by Year 6 leading the weekly award assembly. A pupil elected as an ambassador diligently awarded stickers for acts of kindness and empty plates at lunchtime.

- My observations of playtime showed this to be exceptionally positive. Pupils told me about how staff visited other schools to bring back new ideas and improve their playground experience. This has clearly been achieved. Pupils have access to far more equipment, games and exciting activities. They are offered dance, table tennis, hoops and climbing activities. No pupil is left out. Pupils told me that fighting and bullying are now very rare because they were no longer bored. Pupils' awareness of equalities issues has also been actively considered; a boy told me his team needed more girls to play because they were just as good as boys and in fact played more tactically.
- Teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection because leaders monitor it closely through formal observations, continual 'drop-ins' and informal visits to lessons. Teachers are proud of their work and they have established trusting relationships with pupils, who in turn reflect the same by working well with one another.
- Pupils feel that learning is fun and interesting because adults try hard to make this so. Pupils' books and vibrant class and corridor displays reflect a wide and stimulating range of learning experiences. Year 5 develop historical enquiry by comparing and contrasting the lives of crane drivers in Docklands 100 years ago and now. British values are actively taught, for example by visiting the Royal Courts of Justice.
- The middle leadership team are active and they feel empowered to develop the curriculum. They have an accurate view about what needs to be done because they are active participants in school improvement. They told me that improving consistency in assessment and marking was a key priority. In group discussion, one member of staff said, 'We have the same ambitions, we know where the drive needs to go and we are ready for the challenge.'
- The governing body take their responsibilities very seriously. They have a secure understanding about the school because they seek strong evidence about how effectively it works. They operate creatively to gather evidence about the school. For example, governors' meetings include group activities with staff and governors to scrutinise information and a governors' newsletter explains their role to parents. Governance is highly effective and challenges leaders appropriately.
- The school improvement plan has been drafted in consultation with staff and governors. Together methodical checks are undertaken at quarterly intervals to assess how effectively the school is working towards its end of year objectives. My inspection evidence aligns with self-evaluation information that the school is on track to meet these goals.
- There is a clear aspiration that the school should be moving towards more outstanding practice. A one-year strategic plan, as it is currently, does not consider how to plot improvements in the long term. Neither does it help

governors or leaders to evaluate the impact of current initiatives over time.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- attainment in writing increases quickly by:
 - insisting on higher expectations by staff and pupils about the presentation and marking of work
 - making sure meaningful opportunities promote pupils' interests to write at length and to a high standard across the curriculum
- assessment, including in the early years, uses performance information to identify and inform next steps in learning to increase the rate of pupils' progress
- the strategic plan sets longer-term objectives to drive the aspiration to become an outstanding organisation within an agreed timescale.

Yours sincerely

Ann Debono
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, staff and members of the governing body. The inspector jointly observed teaching and learning with the headteacher. Together, they briefly visited most classrooms. The inspector spoke informally to pupils in classrooms. She observed lunch in the dinner hall and playtime activities. A wide range of documentation was scrutinised, including evidence of pupils' work, online performance information, governors' records of their meetings and safeguarding information. The school action plan and self-evaluation documents were also evaluated.