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Ms Joanna Tarrant
Headteacher
Elm Court School
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Dear Ms Tarrant

Short inspection of Elm Court School

Following my visit with Gary Rawlings, Ofsted Inspector, to the school on 9 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 the school was judged to be good in November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You have continued to drive improvement and evaluate innovative developments across the school. The recent restructuring and expansion of your leadership team have enabled distinct lines of responsibility to be implemented. Your senior leaders have a clear focus on developing current initiatives for teaching, learning and assessment, and for strengthening pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare.

You and your leadership team have identified the priorities for improving the outcomes for pupils. All staff recognise the high expectations set by leaders. Consequently, staff convey similar expectations to pupils across the school. A strong culture of inclusion promotes the welfare and safety of all pupils. Leaders regularly review the curriculum so that it is broad, flexible and supportive. As a result, there is an extensive range of subjects that include both vocational and academic learning. This promotes opportunities for pupils to work and learn well from a range of adults, including support staff.

The school environment is bright, vibrant and colourful. The well-kept learning displays in classrooms are complemented by an engaging colour scheme that runs throughout the school. Therefore, staff and pupils take pride in the environment. They recognise your efforts as headteacher to ensure that the buildings are well maintained, so that the school feels a welcoming environment to all. As a result, behaviour is positive when pupils arrive and enter the school. The corridors are litter free and pupils trust staff to safeguard their valuables during the day. Parents are complimentary about the environment and atmosphere of the school.

Your self-evaluation is accurate in identifying the areas of strength and is externally moderated to provide challenge. Leaders have addressed the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. As a result, the achievement of pupils continues to rise and English currently outperforms mathematics. However, the impact of new initiatives is not sharply evaluated. Consequently, these initiatives have not been quickly embedded.

The latest 2015 school information confirms that outcomes for pupils are strong. Performance gaps have continued to reduce between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. Literacy is now embedded across the school. However, the new system to monitor progress and challenge achievement of all pupils is still in development. As a result, while pupils continue to achieve well from their starting points, teachers are not using the detailed assessment information to extend the progress of all pupils. Leaders recognise this variation. They have established deadlines for a consistent approach to teaching, learning and assessment.

Robust systems have been developed to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders address any teaching that requires improvement and set clear objectives following their observations. Therefore, the high expectations of teaching are maintained. Regular meetings are appropriately used to develop the skills of staff and share good practice.

Pupils engage well in activities before and after school. As a result, they establish positive attitudes towards each other and staff. A variety of educational trips support the curriculum. Pupils have a range of opportunities to learn about other faiths and cultures. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is a strength. Pupils say that behaviour is clearly improving and that any bullying is severely dealt with. Exclusions are low and used only as a last resort.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school has a clear and systematic approach to all aspects of safeguarding. The single central record for recording the checks made on staff meets statutory requirements. You and your leaders place safeguarding at the heart of the school. Staff are very aware of the important role they play in promoting the safety of pupils, and understand how to reduce risk. They work carefully with families and wider agencies to support pupils' welfare, care and guidance.

Regular safeguarding training for staff includes the delivery of aspects such as preventing radicalisation and extremism, sexual exploitation and female genital mutilation. The school works closely with the police and leaders frequently review safeguarding training. Consequently, pupils feel safe and know how to raise concerns. Parents told inspectors that they are supportive of the school's work to promote the personal development, behaviour and welfare of their children.

Inspection findings

- Since the last inspection, you have restructured your leadership team and the governing body has been constituted following a transition from an interim executive board. As a result, there is now an even clearer strategic and operational structure across the school. You have increased leadership capacity. Leaders are now well placed to oversee their areas of responsibility. A strong determination exists for leaders to be innovative. They take appropriate risk in order to improve the outcomes of pupils. Often, this extends to sharing their good practice with other local schools.
- Your evaluation of the school's strengths is accurate when identifying the areas for improvement. However, the evaluation is not always sharp enough. Actions are occasionally identified without specific deadlines. Consequently, new systems are not always embedded as quickly as they could be. You have recognised the need to develop literacy across the school and raise outcomes in English since the previous inspection. As a result, achievement in English is above that of mathematics.
- You use external moderation of your self-evaluation to provide effective challenge and support. This ensures that pupils' outcomes are a priority. Leaders are highly driven when they introduce new initiatives. They correctly understand that some staff are not meeting their expectations for the implementation of the new system for teaching, learning and assessment.
- Leaders continue to review the curriculum and respond to pupils' needs. Pupils undertake qualifications at an appropriate level and experience regular activities to develop self-confidence and independence. For example, sessions include swimming, teaching 'steel pans' and music technology, along with a wide range of extra-curricular activities. A good proportion of pupils learn trade skills at local colleges with the support of teaching staff. This inclusive timetable provides for a diverse curriculum.
- Pupils' work is well presented, particularly in art and in mathematics. Pupils are proud of their work and openly share their learning. They like the new assessment system and understand the importance of targets to improve their learning. Disadvantaged pupils continue to achieve well across the school.

- Careful planning across all subjects develops the literacy skills of pupils. Leaders are now focused on improving numeracy so that it embeds fully across the school. The subject leader for mathematics has been proactive in establishing links with other schools to moderate planning and share good practice.
- Middle leaders ensure that there is a strong focus on developing staff. Teachers are set clear objectives if their teaching requires improvement. Consequently, they are well supported to meet the high expectations of leaders.
- Teachers plan well and focus on pupils' outcomes. However, on occasions they do not use the detailed assessment information available to extend the progress of all pupils. As a result, pupils are not always challenged to make further progress and develop their learning.
- You and your leaders continue to focus on raising attendance. You have implemented a range of successful strategies to support the attendance of all pupils. Attendance is above average and continues to improve. A growing proportion of pupils have full attendance and the school robustly follows up any non-attendance.
- The behaviour of pupils is typically positive. Pupils say that any bullying is rigorously dealt with and that they feel safe. Exclusions are reducing over time and used only as a last resort or when serious incidents occur.
- You and your staff work tirelessly to ensure that incentives are used to promote positive behaviour. Staff are provided with up-to-date information on any behaviour issues. Consequently, staff use appropriate and timely interventions to support the needs of pupils when required.
- Members of the school council speak proudly of the school. Pupils believe that teachers make learning fun and that the school does not tolerate racist language. The school council members are confident that the behaviour of pupils has improved. This is a view shared by staff and parents.
- The Chair of the Governing Body is recently in post. Previously a parent governor, he has an informed knowledge and understanding of the school.
- Governors regularly attend training provided by the local authority. They ensure that the governing body performs its statutory duties well. Governing body meetings are well attended. Records of meetings show clear and appropriate challenge to school leaders. The performance management of the headteacher is carefully undertaken and staff pay awards are not automatic.
- Governors focus well on their areas of expertise. For example, different members of the governing body, who have developed skills accordingly, oversee the responsibility of safeguarding and finance. Consequently, governors are confident in their role since the transition from an interim executive board.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the new assessment system is fully embedded so that it provides sharper information on the progress made by all pupils
- the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is consistently in line with the strong leadership vision of the school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Lambeth local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Lambern
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you as headteacher, senior and middle leaders, teachers and support staff. They also met with a representative from the local authority and the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors met with the school council and spoke to pupils and parents informally.

Inspectors visited a number of lessons with leaders during the day, gathering evidence on teaching, learning and assessment. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's evaluation of its own performance, minutes of meetings, information on the progress of pupils, and the single central record of the checks made on the suitability of staff to work with pupils.