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Dear Mrs Norton

Short inspection of Emberton School

Following my visit to the school on 23 February 2016, 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 September 2010.

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 succeeded in doing this even though the number of pupils has fallen significantly to 13 and you have had to reduce staffing as a result. Parents are positive about your strong leadership during this difficult time and appreciate the way that 'everyone has knitted together'. You aim high and strive to provide pupils with as many opportunities as possible despite limited resources. The new craft club that you ran for pupils after school on the day of the inspection exemplifies this commitment.

Parents value your very small school because of the close relationships and community feel. Pupils are welcoming and care for each other. Staff and parents describe the school as a place where 'children flourish and thrive'. A number of parents gave examples of how their children have grown in confidence since starting at Emberton. One parent explained how proud they were because their child was a narrator in the recent school play as they would never have done that before. Indeed, the curriculum provides a wealth of opportunities for pupils and parents to share knowledge, celebrate different talents and foster new interests. Pupils benefit from exciting topics such as 'Ship Ahoy!' and plenty of outdoor learning. Parents appreciate the learning that takes place in the school allotment; one parent said, 'My son gives me gardening tips!'

You have ensured that pupils continue to achieve well. In 2015, all children reached a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year. Children are well

prepared for Year 1. Pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 continues to be above the national average. Last year, a large majority of pupils achieved standards above those expected for their age. As a result, pupils leave the school well equipped for the next stage in their education. Nevertheless, you know that the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check (phonics refers to letters and the sounds that they make) has fallen over the past two years and is now below the national average. You have taken some steps to address this.

At the last inspection, inspectors identified two areas to improve. You have effectively addressed both of these. Governors have devised a timetable of visits and are now well involved in the life of the school. The frequency of visits has increased and governors review work undertaken to improve the school. Pupils now make a greater contribution to the school and their learning. There is a school council where pupils can share their views and put forward ideas. Pupils diligently act as 'monitors', sharing jobs such as handing out fruit and playground equipment. Behaviour is consistently good because pupils know what is expected and rise well to the challenge. Parents know the next steps in pupils' learning because teachers regularly share targets. Pupils are able to refer to these targets in their exercise books when they are working.

Safeguarding is effective.

You are determined to get safeguarding right for the pupils in your care. Staff receive regular training so that they know what to do if they are worried about a pupil. You ensure that records are detailed and show action you take to keep pupils safe. Strong links with other professionals support this work well. Governors know their responsibilities and check that work to keep pupils safe meets requirements. You keep a close eye on pupils' attendance and look for patterns in absence. When you are concerned, you rightly provide challenge and support to families to bring about improved attendance. Through careful reflection, you find ways to enhance the rigour of safeguarding. For example, you recognised that your young pupils are active and competent users of the internet. Therefore, you have put in place e-safety lessons and have raised parents' awareness of online risks. The school's caring ethos ensures that pupils are well looked after. Pupils with medical needs have appropriate care plans that everyone understands. Each pupil is well known and strong relationships enable pupils to seek help if they need it. Consequently, pupils state confidently that they feel safe at school.

Inspection findings

- You have an accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness. Wisely, you seek external advice to support your judgements. You use your knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses to plan effective improvements. You are responsive to changes and appropriately adapt your plans to help you achieve the best outcomes for pupils. As a result, pupils continue to achieve well overall in reading, writing and mathematics.
- You rightly place a strong emphasis on securing high-quality teaching. Your teacher receives useful feedback from regular checks on teaching and

learning and through more formal appraisal. In this small school, discussions also provide important informal opportunities to reflect on how to make teaching even more effective. Your staff work together closely, share knowledge and have a good understanding of how they can best help pupils to learn effectively.

- There are systems in place to track pupils' progress. You meet often with the teacher to discuss each pupil's learning. These discussions are focused effectively on providing both challenge and support in reading, writing and mathematics. However, there is no system in place to check pupils' progress in phonics. As a result, you cannot easily identify whether pupils are on track to meet the expected standards for their age.
- Governors are committed to training and have benefited from the range of support available from the local authority. They keep up to date with changes in education and maintain clear oversight of their responsibilities. Governors have ensured that the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection have been met. Governors receive reports that evaluate the school's effectiveness but they do not have a clear enough understanding of pupils' achievement. This limits the impact that governors have on driving further improvements.
- Current pupils are making good progress from their starting points. Children in the early years are achieving well in all of the areas of learning. In Year 1 and Year 2, all pupils are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Staff work well together to check pupils' understanding and the teacher uses this information to plan lessons and activities to match pupils' needs closely. You know that careful assessment used well improves pupils' outcomes. Therefore, you are wisely working with partner schools in the Ouse Valley to check that your assessments are accurate.
- Pupils have daily phonics and reading lessons. Some pupils, particularly those in Year 2 who did not meet the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check, have additional lessons with a teaching assistant to help them catch up. Teachers and teaching assistants have a good knowledge of phonics and give pupils further opportunities to practise phonics in other subjects. However, attainment in phonics was below the national average last year and not all pupils are using phonics to help them spell unfamiliar words. This is because there has been insufficient focus on ensuring that pupils are making enough progress in this aspect of their learning.
- The curriculum is lively, stimulating and wide ranging. Different subjects are grouped together in a termly theme. Recent work has centred on the topic of London. Work in pupils' books shows that the curriculum provides pupils with many reasons to write for different audiences. For example, pupils wrote a diary entry from the night of the Great Fire of London. Pupils write regularly at length and make good progress.
- Lessons help pupils to make links in their learning. A geography lesson required pupils to use their reading, writing and geographical skills to make their own maps of Emberton. The teacher helped pupils to recall a walk that they had taken the day before to think about where landmarks were located. One pupil made his own link in learning when the teacher asked pupils to think about where Emberton was in the United Kingdom. Recalling the whereabouts of London from the previous topic he stated, 'We have to

go past London'. Consequently, pupils are developing a sound sense of British geography, extending their knowledge beyond their own locality.

- Parents are welcome in the school and are rightly recognised as partners in teaching. There are regular opportunities for pupils to share learning with their parents. During the inspection, parents joined their children to decorate a plate with an iconic image of London. Pupils were able to demonstrate to their parents their painting skills as well as learn new techniques from them. There were some impressive results, including a discernible 'Gherkin' building and the Canary Wharf skyline at night. Parents value these experiences and consider this a defining feature of the school. Almost all parents would recommend the school.
- Pupils behave well at school. Poor behaviour is rare. Pupils, parents and staff report that there is no bullying. Pupils of all ages care for each other and play well together. For example, some girls asked if they could join some others in a game throwing a hoop onto a cone. The others stepped aside and invited them to take their turn first. Adults in the school show the same level of care to pupils and this helps them to learn how to behave well. Consequently, all pupils are happy at school.
- You aim to build confidence and independence in pupils. You hold popular celebration assemblies and award pupils for being 'Champion Independent Learners'. Through this, you reward pupils' efforts to extend their learning, both at home and at school. As a result, pupils persevere with their work and build confidence in each other. One pupil was heard saying to another, 'Do you want to try that one? I think you can do it better than me.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- governors check regularly the impact of teaching on pupils' outcomes and use this to hold leaders to account
- a system to track pupils' progress in phonics is implemented to ensure that teaching and learning is effective
- the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in phonics meets or exceeds the national average.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Milton Keynes Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Dulong
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and considered your evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I visited one lesson with you and an art workshop. I spoke to eight parents and considered six responses, including comments, to the online survey Parent View. I looked at pupils' books, spoke with them and observed their behaviour around the school. I met with four governors and with a representative of the local authority. I met with you to discuss safeguarding and pupils' achievement. I considered a range of documents including safeguarding checks, policies and procedures.