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Anne Platt
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Dear Mrs Platt

Short inspection of Empingham CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 June 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 predecessor school was judged to be good in November 2010.

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, you have focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning to good effect. Pupils are making good progress in their learning and are achieving well.

Pupils' outcomes at the end of Year 6 have been significantly above the national averages for all subjects for the past three years. Last year, the school was congratulated by the Department for Education for all Year 6 pupils achieving a Level 4B or above in all subjects.

Pupils display positive attitudes to their learning. In the Reception class, children have enjoyed learning about the life cycle of frogs and have written good explanations in their books. Pupils in Class 3 were inspired by their second world war topic and presented their work to parents in a class assembly. Relationships between adults and pupils are very positive, which leads to a warm and inclusive learning environment within school.

Pupils enjoy the positions of responsibility that the school provides and they carry them out diligently. The sport leaders organise games at lunchtimes and the digital leaders ensure that no illegal games have been downloaded on the school's computers. The house captains motivate their teams to collect team points to see

which house will earn the party at the end of term. Pupils take pride in these roles and show real commitment to the school.

At the previous inspection, inspectors asked leaders to accelerate pupils' progress at key stage 1 and to improve the provision in the early years. The school has had much success tackling these areas. Outcomes at the end of key stage 1 have been rising since the previous inspection; however, they have not been significantly above the national average for the past three years. The provision in the early years is good and the children thrive there. The number of children who achieve a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year is much higher than the national average.

I have asked you to continue to work on improving the pupils' writing to enable more pupils to achieve above age-related expectations. In addition, I have also asked you to provide more opportunities for pupils to plan their own investigations in science, to record their results, and to write conclusions to develop their scientific skills further.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your deputy lead safeguarding well in the school. If there is a concern involving a child, you take swift and appropriate action to address the concern. Records are detailed and securely stored. The safeguarding policy contains the latest government guidance, which the school follows. Some governors have attended safer recruitment training to enable them to make the appropriate checks before appointing a member of staff. The school building and grounds are clean, well kept and secure.

Pupils have a good understanding of e-safety and know not to pass on personal details online. Pupils say behaviour is good in school and school records show that there have been no incidents of bullying in the current academic year. Pupils' attendance at school is consistently above the national average.

Inspection findings

- You have led the school well in your first year at Empingham. Your focus has been to improve the quality of teaching and to raise standards. Through the delivery of tailored training and development, together with regular checks on teaching and learning, the quality of teaching is now at least good and sometimes better.
- The very large majority of staff feel that the school is well led and that the opportunities for continuous professional development support them to improve teaching and learning.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils have opportunities to lead collective worship and Class 3 visited both a mandhir and a mosque in Peterborough to develop their knowledge of other faiths. To celebrate Her Majesty's 90th birthday, each class learned about the cultures of different countries belonging to the Commonwealth. Older pupils know the younger pupils well and ensure that they are happy at breaktimes.

- The school council has been learning about the rights of children and has communicated this to other pupils in the school. Pupils are respectful of people who may have different lifestyles from their own. They feel strongly that everyone is equal and should be treated equally. As a result, they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Children have a good start in the Reception class. The teacher visits all the children before they start school to help to ensure a smooth transition into school. The children use their knowledge in phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) to read difficult words independently, for example 'lightning'. The most able pupils are challenged to deepen their learning in mathematics. Once children showed that they could count on in tens and twos from zero, they were asked to start counting on from numbers ending in five. As a result, the children make good progress and outcomes are high compared to the national average at the end of the Reception Year.
- Reading is taught well. Training for staff on the teaching of phonics has accelerated pupils' achievement. Outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check this year are expected to be much higher than last year's national average.
- At key stage 2, teachers challenge pupils well to read with expression, to develop inference skills, and to extend pupils' vocabulary. During a group session reading *The Sheep-Pig* by Dick King-Smith, pupils were guided to read with a different expression when words were written in italics. Pupils were asked to explain what 'sourly' and 'glutton' meant. In addition, they were challenged to think of alternative words and to think about why those words were in the text. Consequently, pupils' understanding of the text improved rapidly.
- Pupils are provided with exciting activities through which to learn scientific knowledge. In Class 1, pupils watched chickens hatching from eggs, and recorded what they saw; however, across the school, pupils are not given enough opportunities to plan investigations, to record the results, and to write conclusions. As a result, their investigative skills are not as well developed as they could be.
- The mathematics leader has led training on developing pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills. Evidence in pupils' work shows that pupils are being given more opportunities to solve problems. For example, in Year 1, pupils were asked how many animals Noah could have seen, if he saw 12 legs. Consequently, pupils are making good progress in mathematics and the most able are deepening their knowledge and skills.
- The older pupils are able to write excellent sentences. One pupil, writing a diary entry as a soldier in the second world war, wrote, 'I crouched down on my tummy and readied my gruesome gun, whilst peering through my tiny binoculars'. Pupils have a good knowledge of spelling and they apply their skills in grammar effectively in order to write complex sentences; however, there is a noticeable drop in the standard of writing when pupils write in subjects other than English. As a result, not as many pupils are achieving above age-related expectations in writing as they are in reading and mathematics.
- Pupils enjoy the topics that they study and are gaining good geographical and historical knowledge. In Class 2, pupils have learned about the different

layers of the rainforest and about the Yanomami tribe. In Class 3, they listened to the broadcast by Neville Chamberlain in 1939, following the declaration of war against Germany and used role play, either to be a reporter or to be Neville Chamberlain. This deepened their knowledge and understanding of British history.

- The governors are skilled and carry out their role as a critical friend to the school well. They challenge school leaders to improve the progress of pupils and receive regular, detailed reports to update them on the school's progress. Governors visit the school regularly to find out information at first hand. They appreciate the work of the headteacher and the way that she has taken the time to develop a good understanding of the school.
- All parents who responded to Parent View said their children were happy and safe at school. Parents who spoke to the inspector were unanimous in their support for the school. One parent commented, 'Pupils look after each other'; however, nearly half of the parents who responded on Parent View did not feel the school was well led or managed. Inspection evidence did not support this view.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. Staff plan specific interventions to meet the pupils' needs and the special educational needs coordinator and teachers monitor the progress of the pupils closely.
- Pupils eligible for the pupil premium achieve as well as their classmates. The school offers a range of intervention strategies to support pupils' academic and physical fitness. The school also uses a learning mentor to support pupils' emotional well-being, if parents request this support. Service children attend school very well and their achievement is good.
- The school uses the sports funding well to ensure that the pupils take part in a variety of competitions and sports against other local schools to develop pupils' physical well-being.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils apply their writing skills consistently across the curriculum, in order to make faster progress
- pupils are given more opportunities to investigate in science, including planning their own investigations, recording their results, and writing up their conclusions.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Finch
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met you, the deputy headteacher, the leaders for the early years and English and the special educational needs coordinator. I spoke with parents before school and observed pupils at breaktime. I visited every classroom with you and we looked at pupils' work. I met with four members of the governing body, including the chair and the vice-chair. I met with a group of pupils from both key stages 1 and 2. We reviewed records about keeping children safe and about attendance. I studied your school development plan and your self-evaluation. I looked at documents relating to performance management and your evaluations of teaching and learning. I considered the 11 responses to Parent View; the 10 responses to the Ofsted free text service; the 13 responses to the staff survey; and the six responses to the pupil survey.