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Julie Withey
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Dear Ms Withey

Short inspection of Eastcroft Park School

Following my visit to the school on 1 December 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 February 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Eastcroft Park remains a school where the individual strengths of pupils and staff are valued. Across classes and subjects, the emphasis is be proud of who you are, have a go when things are difficult, respect others and aim to do your best. As a result, pupils achieve well across subjects, parents are strongly supportive of the school and staff take pride in their work.

Pupils continue to benefit from a wide range of interesting and well-planned learning across subjects. Throughout the school, there is a successful focus upon pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. Your leadership of the school remains strong. Since the previous inspection, you have increased staff participation in reviewing progress and setting future priorities. Staff continue to access a wide range of appropriate training opportunities. In addition, you are developing staff skills so they contribute to, and increasingly lead, different aspects of the school's work. Staff and leaders know the key areas for improvement within the school. Clear actions are being taken to raise the achievement of pupils, including the most able pupils, across subjects.

Governors have a good overall knowledge of the school and are increasingly debating what you and staff are achieving. They are very supportive of the school and of your leadership. We discussed the need to make sure that governors give

even greater challenge about teaching, learning and assessment including the early years.

A wide range of information shows that you are correct in your evaluation that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment within the school is consistently good and sometimes better. You have addressed the sole recommendation made at the previous inspection about making sure that teaching in key stage 2 improved. Nonetheless, you are ambitious to raise the quality of staff work even further. You are taking clear steps to increase the challenge, support and insight teachers and teaching assistants are given about successful early years and primary education. You recognise that in the early years staff need to make even better provision to develop children's writing skills and thinking skills.

As a result of your high expectations, the quality of the rooms and corridors throughout Eastcroft Park are maintained to a high standard. Much care is taken to celebrate pupils' efforts and achievements in displays on the walls and to present exciting areas in which to learn. Outside one classroom, a display about the Blitz includes real soldiers' helmets, bags and empty gas canisters for pupils to handle. Across the school, there is a keen emphasis on promoting reading. Your approach includes some unique aspects of provision: where else could a pupil go to read in the large room behind the door of the small, blue police box or into a nearby spaceship?

Safeguarding is effective.

You have made sure that arrangements for the care and protection of pupils, families and staff are thorough and working well. As acknowledged at the previous inspection, the school provides a high level of care and assistance to pupils whose circumstances might make them vulnerable. The benefit of such support shows in the positive improvement in many pupils' safety and well-being while attending the school. Records kept by staff about concerns, referrals and support for pupils are detailed and of high quality. Links with other professionals are developed well and help keep pupils safe.

Leaders provide staff with a wide range of safeguarding training, using expertise from within the school and from further afield. This means that staff are up to date in their knowledge of child protection. Staff understand how to recognise, record and report important issues such as neglect, sexting and online grooming. You have trained and challenged staff so that they understand the risks to pupils of exposure to radicalised views of life in modern Britain. Clear arrangements are in place to prevent mobile phone use and to make sure that only school cameras are used for recording pupils' work. Staff know how to refer any concerns they might have about an adult harming a child. Nevertheless, we discussed the need to make sure that safeguarding policies and procedures already in place within the school are reflected clearly within the child protection policy.

Inspection findings

- Eastcroft Park remains a good and improving school because of strengths in leadership, teaching, pupils' achievement and their personal development. Parents and pupils are very pleased with the extra activities on offer. Pupils value the wide range of sporting activities, the opportunities to sing in the school choir and the exciting experiments at 'Big Bang Club' such as exploding model volcanoes. Teaching in different subjects is planned with much care, so learning in classes is as varied as possible. For example, in art, pupils not only learn skills such as printmaking, they learn much about successful artists like Klee or Matisse as well as participating in extensive school art celebrations.
- Pupils are encouraged to volunteer for roles to assist in the smooth running of the school. For example, some pupils act as 'eco warriors' to save electricity and prevent too much wasting of water. Within classes, there is a keen emphasis on helping pupils to be ready for life in modern Britain by teaching them to understand laws and individual liberty. Some pupils have participated in creating class charters and learned about one another's dreams and ideas. One notable success of the school has been the considerable attention given to agreeing and providing extra opportunities for pupils' learning. For example, you aim for all pupils to participate in at least two community projects before leaving the school. You make sure that each pupil experiences the thrill of seeing their own artwork displayed for the public. You aim that each pupil can talk knowledgeably about the work of at least three authors. Because learning at Eastcroft Park is so interesting, pupils want to come to school and their attendance is now similar to that found in other schools nationally.
- Governors have acted successfully to make sure the school finances have become healthy over the last five years. They keep a close check on the school budget and they are looking to share the review of school finance even more widely across members. The governing body has engaged well with expertise from outside of the school to help them improve their work. This assistance has greatly improved the extent to which governors contribute in meetings of the governing body and share their individual insights for wider discussion. New members have joined the governing body and feel well supported with their roles. Governors receive a good range of information from leaders about the school and they visit the school regularly so they can better understand the work of leaders. They know the key strengths and priorities for improvement in the school and are learning much more about pupils' experiences across subjects. However, governors do not ask enough challenging questions of leaders about teaching, learning and assessment, including the early years.
- Staff and leaders give much attention to developing the youngest children's emotional confidence, physical skills and their communication and language abilities. As a result, the proportion of children achieving well at the end of Reception rose markedly in 2016. Disadvantaged children are beginning to catch up with other children in their learning. Clear actions are being taken to make sure that the wide range of recent improvements to teaching, learning and assessment are sustained this year. Leadership of the early years in the school is passionate, honest and ambitious. Leaders recognise their next priority is for staff to give increased support for children's thinking skills so as to deepen their

learning much further. Children's writing, mathematics and reading are being developed much more successfully by staff. Nevertheless, we discussed that even more opportunities should be provided to develop children's writing across Nursery and Reception.

- There is a close focus being pursued across classes to raise the achievement of the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils. Staff are participating in a wide range of training to improve their work. Through participation in a development project about assessment, teachers are starting to check all pupils' progress much more closely. They are using assessment information with increasing skill to improve their teaching. Staff have a rapidly improving understanding of what to expect of pupils in different age groups.
- The teaching of mathematics has already been strengthened through careful reviews of pupils' work by leaders. By making full use of expert advice from outside of the school, leaders have also looked closely at the quality of mathematics teaching and given much helpful feedback to staff. Training with local schools and participation in a development project about mathematics teaching are firmly in place and strengthening staff and leaders' expertise.
- Your extensive work to develop pupils' ability to read, their enthusiasm for books and their knowledge of a range of authors is helping pupils to achieve well in their reading. The library and numerous reading areas are well stocked, used regularly and contain an exciting range of books. For example, there are many books provided to appeal to boys. Pupils' overall attainment in the Year 1 phonics screening checks has remained broadly in line with the national figures. However, disadvantaged pupils in the school are catching up with other pupils nationally. In key stage 1 and 2, you have identified that stretching the abilities of the most able readers is a priority. Thus, you are pursuing clear actions to further strengthen the teaching of reading across the school such as through the gifted and talented book club.
- While it is too soon to see the full impact of recent changes to teaching and learning in the school, there are positive signs of improvement. For example, pupils' work in Year 1 shows mathematics tasks taking a stronger focus on extending and deepening pupils' thinking and problem-solving. Most-able pupils in Year 6 are being better stretched and challenged through the tasks set in science activities. Recent assessments by teachers suggest that the proportion of pupils working at a greater depth in their reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 1 is starting to improve well. Information also indicates that many more of the pupils eligible for pupil premium funding are beginning to achieve at greater depth in their learning. Recent assessments of pupils indicate that the proportion of pupils who were working at greater depth in their writing at the end of Year 5 has increased well during their first term in Year 6.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the child protection policy sets out clearly the wider safeguarding procedures and policies already in place in the school
- support for children's writing and thinking skills is strengthened in the early years so that children make even greater progress in their learning

- governors give greater challenge to the school about teaching, learning and assessment including in the early years.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, you and I met regularly throughout the day and observed teaching in a sample of classes together. We looked at examples of pupils' work from different subjects and year groups and talked to pupils. I looked at the quality of displays on classroom walls and corridors and checked the provision of books across the school and listened to some pupils read. I met with four members of the governing body, including the chair and a representative of the local authority. I spoke to some staff about their work, including the school learning mentor, who is the senior school leader for safeguarding. With the school business manager, we reviewed records of checks on the suitability of staff to work with children as well as records of the recruitment of staff. I spoke to some parents as they dropped their children off at school at the start of the day. All of my discussions were focused around lines of enquiry that were formed to test if the school remains good. I checked whether safeguarding is effective and reviewed what impact the school is having upon the achievement of the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils. I checked how well governors are supporting and challenging the school and reviewed how well children, including disadvantaged children, are achieving in the early years.