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Mrs Melanie Vine
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Dear Mrs Vine

Short inspection of Earls Colne Primary School and Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 14 November 2017, 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 previous inspection. You and your leadership team provide clear and coherent leadership and are dedicated to working with both the pupils and the community. You provide a strong sense of direction which motivates staff and pupils to achieve well. Parents and staff alike recognise the high quality of leadership in your school. There is a strong sense of teamwork and high morale among staff.

You and your staff have created a warm and welcoming school. Your staff know pupils and their families well. This, together with the high priority given to supporting pupils' personal development and welfare, continues to be a strength of your school. Parents are overwhelmingly positive and expressed appreciation for the support given to their children. Pupils and staff have very positive relationships.

During the previous inspection, many strengths were identified in your school: the good start that children make in the Nursery and Reception class; the good provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities; the good teaching that leads to good outcomes for pupils; and the support and challenge offered by your governors. These remain considerable strengths.

You, other leaders and governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas to be developed. This is because you regularly check on how well pupils are doing and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment they

receive. The school's self-evaluation is accurate. You and your leadership team have developed an improvement plan which identifies the right priorities to help improve the school further. You, other leaders and governors have high expectations of pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and are ensuring continued improvement within the school. Staff speak highly of the professional development they receive.

You ensure that your topic-based curriculum, together with a range of high-quality enrichment experiences, keeps your pupils interested and motivated. Pupils talked with excitement about their recent trip to visit a castle and dressing up as monarchs through the ages. Pupils enjoyed hearing about the perseverance of an author and felt they had learned from this that, 'You must keep on going for it.' Pupils also commented positively on the wide range of clubs and extra-curricular activities that are on offer to them and the wide range of sporting activities.

Pupils are extremely polite and well mannered. Pupils are keen to contribute to their school. For example, some pupils talked about their responsibilities within their classes and Year 6 pupils are keen to be buddies for reception children. Pupils are articulate and express their views and opinions confidently. Their attitudes to learning are highly positive, as can be seen in their diligence in class. Pupils work very well together. This was summed up by one child who said, 'It boosts your confidence to learn with other people because they have different strategies you can learn from.'

Safeguarding is effective.

All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You ensure that all necessary checks are made on all staff prior to taking up appointments. Records are complete, up to date and checked regularly. Staff and governors undertake regular and relevant training. Any concerns about pupils are raised immediately. You hold regular meetings to share any concerns regarding pupils and this ensures that nothing is overlooked. When there has been the need, staff have worked closely with other professionals, such as health and family support, to make sure that pupils are safe and well supported.

Pupils report feeling very safe in your school. They have a good awareness of when they may be at risk in a range of situations and how to manage this effectively. Pupils relate this to when they are using the internet and know who to speak to if they are concerned. Parents are confident that their children are well looked after. Parents who responded to the Parent View questionnaire overwhelmingly agreed that their children are safe at school.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain whether the school remains good, my first line of enquiry was to consider whether leaders and teachers make accurate assessments of pupils' work and whether they use this information to plan lessons that challenge pupils to progress well. This was an area for improvement highlighted in the previous

inspection report. I found that teachers in the school regularly assess pupils' work and offer them helpful feedback. They set targets consistently, in line with the school's policy for assessment. Pupils say they find this useful. Their books show that they make improvements to their work and as a result, move to more challenging work.

- Leaders check the accuracy of teachers' assessments regularly. The school regularly makes use of interim assessments to check how pupils are progressing. You, your leaders and teachers now use pupils' performance information effectively to address any areas of underachievement and to put in place relevant programmes to help pupils who may need to catch up.
- You, your leaders and staff have worked hard to develop children's approach to learning, whereby they are skilled at selecting the right level of challenge for themselves, particularly in literacy and mathematics. Pupils report that they very much enjoy this and that they like to push themselves to take on the next level of 'hot challenge', from 'Korma' to 'Vindaloo' and this was evident in my visits to lessons.
- Teachers have more recently begun to work on collecting more detailed assessment information in subjects other than mathematics and English. These assessment points are woven into all curriculum subjects and provide information about the progress pupils are making but are yet to be used fully to match work to pupils' needs.
- The hot challenges have only recently been introduced across the school into foundation subject lessons and as a result, in some lessons, activities do not always provide stretch for all pupils. Where this is the case, sometimes learning time is not maximised, as challenges are not always well matched to pupils' needs.
- My second line of enquiry was also an area for improvement after the previous inspection report. I looked at how well teachers plan, in subjects other than English and mathematics, to allow pupils to apply their literacy and numeracy skills.
- I found that the curriculum leader and subject leaders have a detailed and carefully planned curriculum which identifies how pupils in all years can use their English and mathematical skills across a range of subjects. This is regularly checked by the curriculum and phase leaders.
- Observing lessons, looking at pupils' books and at the work on their themes displayed in classrooms show there is clear evidence that this is happening. For example, in a Year 5/6 science lesson, pupils undertook an experiment to explore how mirrors reflect light and help us to see objects. During this lesson, pupils used their mathematical skills and language skills to talk about perpendicular lines, angles, symmetry and were challenged with measuring and calculating the angles between light beams.
- In pupils' work, there was ample evidence of pupils writing at length about a wide variety of topics in different subjects and employing a range of writing styles to do this.
- An analysis of pupils writing suggests that it is sometimes their inconsistent

application of their grammar and punctuation skills which prevents them reaching the higher standard.

- My third line of enquiry was about the progress made by disadvantaged pupils. This was because in end of each of the key stage assessments, this group of pupils did not make as much progress as others in the school, or as much progress as other pupils nationally.
- Leaders provided a clear analysis of pupils' outcomes from the previous year, the outcome of which has been used to amend programmes where necessary. Leaders have provided additional support for pupils who are at risk of falling behind.
- I observed disadvantaged pupils in class, and they make as much progress in class and engage as well in their learning as their classmates. I met with eligible pupils who talked very positively about their learning and the support their teachers give to them.
- I examined the school's own current assessment data which shows that disadvantaged pupils currently in the school are generally making good progress from their starting points.
- The inclusion leader, who has responsibility for deploying the pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils, manages the funding effectively to provide well-matched and wide-ranging support for pupils. The pupil premium report is comprehensive and shows the impact of specific actions taken. The inclusion leader makes very good use of the frequent assessment information to adjust and adapt provision and meets regularly with teachers and phase leaders to discuss strategies for supporting any pupils who are falling behind.
- Governors are aware of the funding and the impact it should make. They take regular reports on the progress of pupils in this group.
- Attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with education, health and care plans was also below national expectations in 2017. Therefore, this became my final line of enquiry. Your school systems with regards to monitoring and promoting good attendance are thorough. Governors take a keen interest in this. Leaders and class teachers work exceptionally hard to emphasise to parents the importance of good attendance and pupils value their awards for good attendance.
- You have effective procedures for following up poor attendance and were able to provide evidence of improved attendance for some of these pupils. You were able to provide evidence for individual pupils and some good reasons for low attendance.
- Attendance for the last and current year shows strong improvement and is now in line with national expectations.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- in foundation subjects, teachers refine their planning to ensure that tasks

challenge pupils fully so that learning time is maximised

- a greater proportion of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, achieve the higher standard in writing in end of key stage 2 writing assessments by applying their grammar and punctuation skills in their writing.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Sutton
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your leadership team, parents, four governors and pupils. I spoke with a representative of the local authority by telephone. I visited all the classrooms and the nursery, and looked at pupils' work. I observed behaviour around the school. I reviewed records of the single central record, of employment checks, child protection systems, risk assessments, health and safety documentation, governing body information, the school website, staff training records, curriculum planning, pupils' assessment and progress information, inclusion information, attendance information and the school self-evaluation and improvement plan. I took account of the 75 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, 71 text messages from parents, 17 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey and 27 responses to the online pupil survey.