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Mr Paul Edwards
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Dear Mr Edwards

Short inspection of Offley Endowed Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

In the short time you have been at the school, the positive impact of your leadership is evident. Your focused approach to get to know the school's strengths and development areas quickly, alongside the induction provided by your effective governors and your able assistant headteacher, means that you already know the school very well. Your high expectations and 'big dreams' for the school have galvanised staff and governors. They share your ambition to make Offley Endowed Primary an outstanding school.

Your school is a smaller-than-average primary school and, consequently, your staff know each child individually. You, your staff and governors use this personal approach to ensure pupils' social and emotional needs are effectively met alongside their academic development. Likewise, the pupils all know and help each other, from the youngest to the oldest. Older pupils enjoy the extra responsibilities they are given, for example reading and playing with the Reception children, and meeting with the local vicar to plan and lead assemblies. In this way, pupils successfully uphold the school's ethos, 'Be all you can be.'

Pupils talk about their school with enthusiasm and pride. They get off to a good start in the high-quality early years provision and, throughout their time at school, appreciate that you and your staff provide 'lots of interesting things to do'. The school's Christian ethos contributes very well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and is at the heart of everything the school does. Values such as honesty, respect, forgiveness, care and love are woven into every aspect of the school's work. Pupils understand that such qualities will enable them to become caring and responsible adults in the future. They told me that living out the school's values is important as it 'will help us to grow up to be good citizens'.

You have quickly gained the trust and respect of parents as an effective leader. Almost all parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were full of praise for the quality of education that their children are receiving. They appreciate the 'kindness and respect' shown by teachers, the 'very friendly and caring' attitude of pupils towards each other and the 'brilliant' progress their children are making.

In the previous inspection, writing and mathematics were identified as areas to develop. Senior and middle leaders have provided training for staff which has led to improvements in the teaching of these subjects. In the early years, there are many opportunities for children to mark-make and develop their early writing. Across all classes in key stage 1 and key stage 2, pupils are now writing extensively in all subjects as seen in the written work in their books. Teachers expect pupils to use what they learn in literacy when writing in other subjects. Consequently, because of this, pupils respond by consistently producing the same high-quality writing in all their books. You, leaders and governors are not complacent and recognise that while standards of attainment in writing are strong, more can be achieved. You acknowledge that the most able pupils in key stage 1 are not always challenged to reach their potential in literacy lessons and that expectations of what these pupils can achieve should be raised.

In mathematics, leaders have ensured that staff have higher expectations and there is now a more consistent teaching approach across the school. Work in pupils' books shows that across all year groups there is an emphasis on securing basic mathematical skills and then using these to solve mathematical problems across a range of subjects. The most recent pupil-assessment information for 2017 shows that at the end of Year 6, pupils made strong progress in mathematics and that standards are now at least in line with the national average.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors place a high priority on all aspects of safeguarding and this is ensuring that arrangements are fit for purpose. Thorough checks are made to ensure that all staff and volunteers are suitable to work with children. These are routinely monitored by governors to confirm they follow statutory guidance. Together with the other designated safeguarding leads, you promote a strong culture of vigilance. Staff and governors receive regular training to ensure that they have an up-to-date understanding of the vulnerabilities faced by pupils. Staff and

governors understand that the safety of pupils is everybody's responsibility. You work closely with other professionals and services to ensure that children and families receive timely and effective support.

Pupils told me that they are well looked after in school. They feel safe in school and know how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations, including when online. Pupils say that there is no bullying in the school and they can talk to the adults in the school if they have any concerns. Parents who completed the online questionnaire overwhelmingly stated that their children are happy and safe in school.

Inspection findings

- In order to check whether the school remains good, I followed a number of lines of enquiry. I considered the quality of teaching and learning in key stage 1, and the progress pupils are making. This is because published data shows that pupils' achievement is more positive in key stage 2. In 2017, pupils in key stage 1 attained below the national average in reading and writing.
- Inspection evidence shows that most pupils are progressing well across all subjects as a result of teachers' thorough planning, good subject knowledge, and effective teaching. Teaching assistants are deployed well, and use their considerable skills effectively to support pupils and encourage them to work independently. Pupils enjoy learning and they work with sustained concentration. Pupils welcome the frequent and specific feedback from teachers. They act promptly on the guidance they receive and use this to improve their work.
- The work in pupils' books, displays around the school, and the school's assessment information indicate that the quality of teaching is effective over time. You are aware that the most able pupils are not always sufficiently challenged in their writing tasks. This is already a priority in your improvement plans and you and your leaders are currently leading actions to improve the outcomes of this group of pupils.
- Another line of enquiry focused on how effectively phonics is taught, and if pupils make good enough progress in this area from their starting points. The published data shows that the proportion of pupils that reach the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check has been increasing for the last three years. I was interested to see what actions you have taken to sustain these more positive outcomes for your pupils.
- Leaders have rightly taken effective action to tackle the previous weaknesses in phonics teaching. Teachers now deliver a well-planned and structured approach in lessons. Pupils' progress is closely tracked and targeted support put in place for those pupils who show signs of having difficulty learning phonics. Pupils enjoy reading and use their knowledge of phonics effectively to help them to work out unfamiliar words. Teachers provide pupils with many opportunities to practise and develop these skills further. As a result, pupils' attainment in phonics has improved and in 2017 was in line with the national average.
- Finally, I looked at how leaders monitor the quality of teaching across all subjects

to ensure that pupils achieve well. I met with a group of your subject leaders to gather evidence about teaching and learning in their subjects. This was not limited to English and mathematics because effective schools ensure that pupils make consistently good progress in a wide range of subjects.

- Your subject leaders are confident and knowledgeable. They check the quality of teaching in their subjects rigorously and in many different ways. This includes observing lessons, scrutinising teachers' plans, talking to pupils and looking at pupils' workbooks. Governors hold subject leaders to account by meeting regularly with them to discuss pupils' outcomes, strengths in the teaching of their subject and areas to improve.
- Pupils have access to a wide range of enriching curriculum opportunities. They learn to play musical instruments, engage readily in concerts and other musical events; they take up a wide range of sporting activities and participate in competitive events; they learn a foreign language and they use technology proficiently and safely. As a result, pupils enjoy a broad and engaging curriculum and achieve well across all subjects.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a greater proportion of the most able pupils in key stage 1 are challenged enough to achieve the greater depth in writing they are capable of.

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

Yours sincerely

Fiona Webb
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Meetings were held with you and your assistant headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator and subject leaders. I also met with governors, including the vice-chair of the governing body. I spoke to the school's effectiveness adviser on the telephone about how the local authority supports the school.

You and I discussed the lines of enquiry for this inspection, the school's internal evaluation of its performance, plans for future improvement, and information about current pupils' progress and attainment.

I gathered a range of evidence to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included joint observations of teaching and learning in classes with you. I also observed a whole school assembly.

We looked at a sample of pupils' current work across all subjects and across a wide range of abilities.

I spoke informally to a number of pupils in classrooms about their learning, and met more formally with a group of pupils to talk about their school experience.

Pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 read to me. We discussed their reading habits and I looked at their reading records.

Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff, and case studies about referrals made to external agencies. A discussion was held with you as one of the school's designated safeguarding leads.

The views of 20 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account, as well as the 15 responses parents made using the free-text service. I also considered the views of parents I spoke to during the inspection. I looked at the six responses to Ofsted's online staff survey and the 22 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.