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Dear Mrs Catherine Barron

Short inspection of Elm Wood Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 June 2018, 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 October 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You lead a welcoming, harmonious and inclusive school where staff are highly committed to providing an enriched and exciting curriculum for every pupil. You give pupils many opportunities to improve their skills in different subjects and to develop a love of learning, following the school's motto, 'learn it, use it or lose it'.

You have strengthened leadership at all levels. Skilled staff work together to develop the curriculum and raise standards. Since the previous inspection, you have improved how you use information on pupils' progress. Leaders' development plans are precise and set clear goals and criteria so that you can check and measure progress accurately.

Your dedicated and enthusiastic team of staff share your high ambitions for the school. Staff have relished the opportunities to work with other schools and professionals to develop their knowledge and skills. As a result of well-planned training, you have improved the quality of teaching and standards have improved. The proportions of pupils working at expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics are rising. From their typically low starting points, pupils make good progress through each key stage and in different areas of learning. You would like the most able pupils to make even better progress.

Your hard-working governors know the very school well and make careful and regular checks on how well pupils achieve, including disadvantaged pupils and the

most able. Through regular training, governors keep their skills up to date, including safeguarding. Governors visit the school often and provide just the right balance of challenge and support for leaders.

It is very evident that pupils enjoy coming to school. This is because you have planned a vibrant curriculum which develops pupils' skills in different areas. Pupils relish the many trips and visits that you provide to enhance the curriculum. Those pupils with whom I spoke described frequent trips to support learning, such as a Year 3 visit to Manchester Museum as part of their Ancient Egypt topic. Pupils told me that they enjoy a wide range of sports, including hockey, cricket, rounders and football. Pupils are very proud to have won a recent inter-school World Cup football competition. In lessons and around school, pupils are well behaved, polite and respectful to others. Pupil ambassadors act as role models to younger pupils in the playgrounds and in school. Pupils told me that they feel very safe and that bullying is very rare. They are confident that staff quickly deal with any incidents. Pupils learn to respect others and to value different cultures and religions. They have a very good understanding of British values.

Parents and carers share pupils' very positive view of the school. Parents of children who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities were very keen to tell me how much they value the very caring support that staff give their children. Only a few parents responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents. A typical response described the school as 'a family where every child is valued and has a sense of belonging'.

Since the last inspection, you have demonstrated the ability and determination to improve teaching and learning. Teachers are consistently clear about what pupils are to learn. As a result of teachers' precise instructions and feedback, pupils know what is expected and how to improve their work. Pupils are keen to do their best and produce detailed and accurate pieces of work, including writing. However, there is an inconsistency to handwriting across the school, which you have identified as an area to improve.

You have taken steps to improve the level of challenge for the most able pupils. For example, in mathematics, staff give pupils plenty of opportunities to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills. Across the curriculum, staff ask pupils questions which challenge their thinking and develop their learning. You agree that there is still more to do to improve the progress of the most able pupils across the curriculum, including English and mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You provide staff with regular training and briefings so that they understand the current guidance. You ensure that all necessary checks are made on the suitability of staff to work with children and you check on visitors to the school.

Leaders diligently follow up concerns and make sure that pupils are safe. You work well with a range of external agencies to support pupils' welfare, when necessary. Staff teach pupils how to keep themselves safe, including fire safety and road safety. Through assemblies, lessons and newsletters, you provide parents and pupils with a wealth of information about how to keep children safe online and protect them from harmful content on websites.

Staff have created a culture in which pupils feel safe and know that they have someone in school to talk to if they are worried. Staff and visitors from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children teach pupils to speak to someone if they are concerned. The school's learning mentor works closely with staff to nurture vulnerable pupils and provide support for them and their families.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry, the first of which related to outcomes for disadvantaged pupils across the school. You have a clear understanding of the barriers to learning that this group of pupils face. This is because you know these pupils and their families very well. Staff plan provision very precisely to meet disadvantaged pupils' needs. For example, the additional mathematics tuition that older pupils have received has improved their learning. The learning support mentor provides very effective support to meet pupils' emotional needs and build their confidence and resilience. Evidence from books and from the school's assessment information shows that current disadvantaged pupils are making the good progress that they should in their learning.
- The second focus for the inspection related to the progress of pupils in reading. This was because in 2017, pupils at the end of Year 6 had made less progress in their reading than in mathematics and writing. I found that you have taken the right steps to improve teachers' subject knowledge and teaching strategies in reading. The revised school approach to teaching reading develops pupils' reading comprehension skills such as inference. Across the school, you have raised the profile of reading. Pupils told me how much they enjoy the recently timetabled daily time for reading for pleasure, 'read for me at three'. Teachers read quality class novels to extend pupils' vocabulary and understanding. Pupils read widely and for pleasure. Your school assessment system shows that pupils' attainment in reading is improving. You are taking steps to embed this improved approach to teaching reading so that standards continue to rise.
- I also focused on the attendance of pupils. This was because last year, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities was lower than national averages. I found that most pupils attend school very regularly as they enjoy lessons. Staff diligently follow up absences with pupils' parents and keep a very careful check on attendance. You have introduced a wide range of rewards to encourage pupils to come to school on time and regularly, including 'Punctuality Paddington' and 'Bees Best Attendance'. The impact of these initiatives is that the attendance of some pupils is improving. A before-school club has improved pupils' punctuality. However, you recognise that the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or

disabilities is too low.

- During the inspection, I found that the well-planned and well-equipped outdoor learning areas enhance and enrich teaching and learning. In the early years, children were having great fun exploring and playing. One group of children were manoeuvring their way through trees and bushes on a bug hunt. Others were happily digging in the sand 'at the seaside'. On the playing field, Year 1 pupils were enjoying taking part in a well-organised tag rugby session, as part of school's Healthy Week. In the Forest School area, Year 6 pupils were working together to design and make photo frames and pendants from natural materials. They worked with concentration and cooperation and were proud of the work that they had produced. Through such varied and engaging experiences, pupils across the school develop their confidence and skills in different areas of the curriculum.
- The school's superb mentoring programme lies at the very heart of the caring ethos of the school. Pupils' well-being is of the highest importance to staff. Pupils know whom they can talk to if they are concerned or distressed. Skilled staff work together to ensure that pupils' varied needs are met and that families are supported. Staff teach pupils valuable strategies to develop confidence and resilience. Pupils enjoy a wide range of well-being activities including peer-to-peer massage. During the inspection, the learning mentor was leading a wonderfully calm and relaxing meditation session for a small group of pupils. Across the school, different classes were engaged in a range of interesting and useful lessons as part of Healthy Week, developing their understanding of physical and mental health.
- Staff work with other schools to provide a smooth transition for Year 6 pupils moving on to secondary school. You have developed close partnerships with neighbouring primary schools. Through shared outdoor and adventurous activities such as archery and climbing, pupils establish new friends before they reach Year 7. Your staff work closely with secondary school leaders to make sure that the transition is successful.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of handwriting improves, so that pupils' handwriting develops well over time
- they strengthen progress across the curriculum for the most able pupils
- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities improves
- recent improvements in the approach to teaching reading are embedded so that all pupils reach the standards of which they are capable.

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

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Stevens
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, your assistant headteachers, middle leaders and teachers. I met with the school's safeguarding lead and the school's attendance lead. I also spoke to five governors, including the chair of the governing body. I met with a representative of the local authority. I met with 14 pupils from key stage 2 and spoke informally with other pupils during lessons. I visited classes with you where I observed teaching and learning, looked at pupils' work and spoke with pupils. I also heard pupils from Year 2 and Year 6 read.

I took account of 11 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire. I also met with parents before school. There were no responses to the online staff questionnaire. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan and pupils' behaviour logs. I evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies to keep pupils safe, staff training records, safeguarding checks and attendance information. I undertook a review of the school's website.