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Mr Oliver Woodward
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Woodward

Short inspection of Columbia Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 5 February 2019, 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 December 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You and your leadership team have determinedly tackled the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Leaders know the school well; you demonstrated a frank and accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and areas in need of further work. You have worked effectively to develop leadership throughout the school. Senior leaders and subject leaders provide you with excellent support. They are highly motivated and committed to the school. They check the quality of the curriculum, teaching and learning, the impact of their actions and outcomes in their areas of responsibility. This has helped to improve pupils' outcomes.

Leaders responded successfully to the improvement points from the previous inspection. During this visit I looked in particular at the school's work to improve the teaching of writing and phonics. These are evaluated in the 'Inspection findings', below.

Staff share your determination and work hard, with the aim that every pupil gets the best possible start to their school life. As a result, pupils' progress is strong

throughout the school. Their attainment is above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stages 1 and 2.

You have actively developed a culture of high expectations for all. Pupils acquire new knowledge and skills well. Staff ensure that well-planned activities meet pupils' needs. Pupils I spoke to said that they find the topics they study to be challenging and interesting. Pupils are articulate, listen well and respect others' ideas. As seen in lessons and in the high-quality presentation of work in their books and on display, pupils' attitudes to learning are decidedly positive.

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The safeguarding team is highly efficient in helping pupils to stay safe. Weekly briefing updates for staff and governors ensure that safeguarding is at the forefront of the school's work. Staff understand how to alert leaders to any concerns that they have. Referrals are made in a timely manner. Records are well-organised and detailed. You work effectively with external agencies to promote pupils' safety and provide support for their families.

Where there have been concerns, you have been tenacious in following these through. Pre-employment checks and records to ensure staff are suitable to work with children are comprehensive. Governors are very knowledgeable about the risks children face in the community. They make regular checks on all aspects of safeguarding. Pupils have a thorough understanding on how to stay safe online and say they feel safe in school. Parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their children are safe and happy at school.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed to explore three key lines of enquiry. The first of these was to consider the school's effectiveness in improving pupils' writing, particularly for those pupils capable of achieving the higher standard. This was chosen because the previous inspection identified writing as an area for improvement.
- Teachers demonstrate strong subject knowledge and are ably supported by committed leadership. For example, all pupils are provided with a 'tool kit' for writing; and every class is provided with high-quality texts to promote pupils' skills in writing. As a result, pupils have access to technical and complex vocabulary and accurate punctuation, which they use effectively in their writing across a range of subjects to engage the reader. For example, Year 6 pupils' detailed diaries describing life during the Second World War really brought the experience of war to life.
- As a result of strong teaching, the well-designed English curriculum and the benefits of writing across the curriculum, writing has improved and more pupils are now writing at the higher standard. However, you are not complacent and are striving to ensure that the proportion of pupils reaching the higher standard

is the same as in reading.

- The next key line of enquiry was to find out if pupils receive a broad, balanced curriculum that deepens their knowledge and understanding. We decided on this as you had identified it as a strength of the school. I visited classrooms, looked at pupils' work and talked to pupils to ascertain if this was the case.
- Your well-designed curriculum inspires and motivates pupils to learn and deepens their understanding. Strong links exist between subjects which enable pupils to apply the knowledge and skills they have learned. For example, in Year 5 pupils who were learning about Anglo Saxons designed and made high-quality brooches and used their knowledge to write about them.
- The curriculum model ensures that knowledge and skills are built progressively over time, resulting in clear, planned outcomes. Opportunities are taken to enhance topics through well-organised visits. As a result, the curriculum offers pupils a broad, deep and balanced experience.
- Finally, we focused on the effectiveness of phonics teaching in enabling pupils to read well. We chose this as it was an area identified for improvement in the previous inspection, and you now see it as a strength of the school. The proportion of pupils who achieve the expected standard in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 was above the national average in 2018.
- Teachers' strong knowledge and high expectations have helped children in Reception and pupils in Year 1 to make strong progress in phonics. Teachers introduce new sounds that letters make precisely and ensure that children's pronunciation is accurate. Repetition enables children to secure their knowledge deeply before moving on in their learning. In Reception and key stage 1, teachers assess progress carefully and address any misconceptions. As a consequence, most pupils use their strong understanding of phonics to decode texts and apply well their phonics skills to writing. Additional support for those pupils in Year 2 who did not achieve the expected standard in the phonics screening check enables them to catch up. As a result, they are well prepared for key stage 2.
- Leaders have ensured that books are well matched to pupils' reading ability. This gives pupils confidence and success in reading from the start. Pupils read well because they have a strong understanding of how to use their phonics skills and knowledge to segment and blend unfamiliar words. Pupils apply their phonics skills effectively to their writing and develop into strong writers by the end of Year 2. Consequently, phonics is a strength at the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they further improve pupils' writing, to enable more of them to achieve the higher standard.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Tower Hamlets. This letter

will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Hook
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I examined a variety of documents, including those related to safeguarding, the self-evaluation of the school's performance, school improvement plans, behaviour logs and attendance records.

I visited classrooms with a member of the senior leadership team to observe teaching and learning. I also listened to some pupils from Year 1 and Year 2 read, met with pupils representing the school council and scrutinised a range of pupils' work, including some alongside senior leaders.

Discussions were held with senior leaders, middle and subject leaders, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.

In addition, I considered 16 pupils' responses to the online survey, 34 responses to the staff survey and 94 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey for parents.