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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Debbie Archer and Mr Neil Woods
Joint Headteachers
Ecton Brook Primary School
Ecton Brook Road
Ecton Brook
Northampton
Northamptonshire
NN3 5DY

Dear Mrs Archer and Mr Woods

Short inspection of Ecton Brook Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 2019 with Heidi Malliff, Ofsted Inspector, 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 May 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

As joint headteachers, you have continued to provide a clear vision of high expectations. This is underpinned by a tangible ethos of care which is shared by the whole school team across both school sites.

The Northampton Primary Academy Trust (the trust) works in close partnership with leaders and governors. Effective communication and collaboration mean that school leaders and the trust have an accurate picture of the school. The trust provides effective training and many opportunities for moderation and sharing of good practice with other schools. There is a joint endeavour to achieve the best possible outcomes for pupils.

You ensure that all leaders in the school are clear on their roles and responsibilities. Effective guidance is ensuring that all leaders, including those who are recently appointed, contribute well to the capacity to move the school forward. However, plans for improvement are not sufficiently sharp for leaders to drive consistently rapid improvements.

At the time of the previous inspection, leaders were asked to improve how well English and mathematical skills are used in other curriculum areas. The school has maintained a determination to provide pupils with a broad curriculum and frequent opportunities

to use skills across subjects, particularly in writing. However, leaders are working with the trust to put in place revised frameworks to secure a sequential build-up of the knowledge and skills that pupils need.

Pupils enter the school with skills that are well below those typically expected. At the end of Reception and Year 2, pupils consistently achieve close to national expectations. Given pupils' starting points, they make at least good progress. Pupils' achievement in writing has continued to be a strength across the school. However, at the end of key stage 2, pupils' attainment of expected standards has been variable in reading and mathematics. Pupils' progress from their previous starting points in reading and mathematics fell to well below national averages in 2018. Improving pupils' progress has a high priority on the school's improvement plan.

There have been a number of staffing changes since the last inspection, as well as changes in national expectations. You have reflected carefully upon these and the outcomes for pupils in recent years. Consequently, in the past 12 months, you have revised policies, frameworks and approaches to secure more systematic progress for pupils across the school. These changes need more time to secure consistent, rapid progress.

Pupils' good behaviour and attitudes have been maintained and built upon. Pupils are extremely proud of their school. They feel safe and well supported by all adults. Pupils told inspectors that teachers help them to know how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations, including road safety, and that internet safety is frequently reinforced.

Leaders' chosen approach to the curriculum places a strong emphasis on providing pupils with a wide range of experiences. Pupils told inspectors they have enjoyed recent trips, for example, to a Roman villa, a farm and the National Gallery. The school is also proud to be a Royal Shakespeare Company Associate School.

The school's provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength. Leaders make sure teachers plan explicitly to develop life skills as well as healthy minds and bodies. Pupils relish many opportunities to take on responsibilities as pupil council representatives, digital leaders, young leaders, sports crew, and on the eco committee. Healthy eating is promoted at every opportunity, with all pupils receiving free fruit and pupils experiencing new foods at breakfast club. All pupils enjoy access to a multitude of extra-curricular activities before school, at lunchtime and after school. Different age groups regularly participate successfully in external sports events. Pupils show a great deal of respect for each other's views and beliefs. Pupils are well prepared to be responsible and thoughtful citizens.

Parents we spoke to, and the vast majority of parents who responded to Parent View, agree that their children are happy and safe. Parents and carers have a very high level of confidence in the leadership of the school. They value the approachability of staff and the care that ensure children quickly settle when they join the school. They say that any concerns they have are listened to and dealt with.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a tangible sense of care and commitment to pupils' well-being across the school.

The trust provides effective systems and expertise that underpin leaders' responsibilities. Leaders ensure appropriate vetting checks take place before an adult starts working at the school. Staff receive up-to-date training in keeping children safe. Staff are all clear on how to report any concerns they may have regarding a child's welfare. Governors diligently check these important aspects.

The school provides tailored support to a number of families. The inclusion team effectively builds trust with families with whom it works. Your detailed record keeping supports effective work with external agencies. You and your team are tenacious in following up requests for support to ensure that pupils and their families get the help they need.

Inspection findings

- Leaders ensure that there are consistent class routines, and that classrooms are bright and welcoming and displays are used as useful prompts to pupils' learning. Teachers establish good relationships with pupils which promote pupils' confidence and enthusiasm to tackle learning tasks.
- Leaders take effective action where teaching falls short of the school's high standards. Through effective provision from the trust, you quickly put training and support in place. You know where there is strong practice and use this well to support others. Therefore, despite staff changes, good teaching has been sustained over time.
- Leaders have given a high priority to improving progress in reading, especially in key stage 2. The school already placed a strong emphasis on using good-quality texts as stimuli within topics. The promotion of a love for reading was also a consistent feature. However, pupils' range of vocabulary and depth of understanding have not been sufficiently deep over time. Pupils have not had the skills and understanding to confidently tackle more challenging written comprehension questions.
- During the last 12 months, leaders have worked closely with the trust to identify effective strategies to bring more rigour to the teaching of reading. You introduced a whole-school approach, to explicitly build up pupils' vocabulary and skills such as scanning, inference and drawing on evidence in texts. The evidence in lessons, books and while reading with pupils during the inspection was consistent with leaders' evaluation. Thorough training, ongoing monitoring and responsive support are securing consistent implementation of the school's chosen approach. This is securing clear sequential progress across year groups. Pupils are more confident to write coherent responses to age-appropriate questions.
- In mathematics, leaders have put in place a revised framework that improves the clarity of what pupils need to learn to build sequential knowledge and skills year on

year. Evidence in books and lessons shows that pupils are making secure progress appropriate for their age, particularly in calculation skills.

- Where pupils make the strongest progress in learning, teachers have deep subject knowledge. They fluently adapt questioning and tasks to address pupils' misconceptions. They skilfully move learning on for pupils with different needs across the class. Not all teachers are equally as skilled at moving learning swiftly forward for all pupils.
- The established culture of care is evidenced by staff routinely going 'the extra mile' to give sensitive support to vulnerable pupils and their families. Leaders' tightening of overall frameworks for learning has highlighted that interventions for those pupils who are falling behind could be more precise for more rapid progress. Leaders have put in place diagnostic assessment tools for refining targets for learning. Leaders were able to give examples where this has improved rates of progress for individual pupils. More time is needed for actions to be fully evaluated.
- Since the previous inspection, rates of fixed-term and repeat exclusions have been persistently above national averages. Rates have fallen considerably this year. However, the school serves a vulnerable community with complex needs. Where exclusions have been necessary, they have been well documented and a wide range of effective support put in place.
- There has also been variability in rates of attendance over recent years, including persistent absence rising above national averages. Leaders maintain a clear focus on optimising and improving attendance. There are stringent procedures in place to chase up absence. The school is quick to put in additional support for families where there are difficulties. Attendance this year is close to national averages and persistent absence has improved to below national averages.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- revised frameworks and approaches are embedded to raise standards further
- teachers deepen their subject knowledge to skilfully adapt and move learning forward for all pupils
- priorities and actions for improvement are sharpened to secure more rapid improvement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mandy Wilding
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, we met with yourselves and the deputy headteachers and we shared lines of enquiry. We also met staff with leadership responsibilities for English, mathematics, science, history, art, inclusion and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). We met with representatives of the trust. We spoke with pupils informally across the school day and held a more formal meeting with pupils from Years 5 and 6. We jointly visited all classes to observe pupils learning, speak with them and look at their books. We examined a range of pupils' books from across the school.

We reviewed a range of documentation, including leaders' evaluation of the school's current performance and its plans for further improvement. We considered a number of policy documents, including those for safeguarding. I examined the school's website and checked on the publication of specified information. We spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day and considered the responses of the 34 parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and their free-text responses. We also considered the 40 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey. There were no responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.