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Mrs Gill Humphriss
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Dear Mrs Humphriss

Short inspection of Eckington CofE First School

Following my visit to the school on 29 March 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 May 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. In fact, the school has continued to improve.

Currently, the permanent headteacher is on maternity leave and you are leading the school as acting headteacher until the summer term 2017. You are doing a good job. You stay in close contact with the permanent headteacher and together you have an accurate view of the school's work and performance. You are quick to recognise and celebrate successes but are also alert to areas where further improvements can be made. As a result, your plans for the future development of the school are well informed, realistic and ambitious.

The areas for improvement identified by the previous inspection have been tackled with success. However, in doing so, you and other leaders have managed to raise everyone's expectations even higher. Consequently, you realise that, while academic standards over time have been above average, the most able pupils could do even better, especially in mathematics. You have plans in place to make this happen.

For a small school, there is a lot going on and the school has many strengths. Teaching is effective and leadership is strong. Furthermore, the curriculum is packed full of interesting and worthwhile activities that fuel pupils' curiosity,

introduce them to new experiences and prompt them to work hard and do their best. The sheer variety of activities, quality of teaching and care provided help pupils to grow in confidence, feel safe and develop their abilities, skills and interests. You are mindful of the school's traditions, while also making sure that new ideas and innovation can thrive if this results in improvements to pupils' education.

You make sure that teachers work with staff from other schools and attend regular training on order to keep up to date with the most effective practice. Within school, staff have the opportunity to watch one another at work and everyone is expected to take on a leadership role of some sort. Staff understand your expectations, fulfil their roles well and report that Eckington School is a great place to work.

Pupils behave very well. They are attentive in class, cooperative on the playground and have a voice in shaping aspects of school life. Attendance rates have risen as unnecessary absence has reduced and communication between home and school has improved. Even so, a small number of pupils still have high levels of absence.

Pupils and parents, in their responses to inspection questionnaires and in their comments to me during the inspection, expressed positive views about the school. They drew particular attention to the school's values, standards and leadership. Inspection evidence supports these positive views.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's procedures for keeping pupils safe are fit for purpose. Checks on staff and visitors are carried out properly and records are up to date. Staff in the school, including those who might be visiting or on a student placement, demonstrate a clear understanding of what to do should they have a concern about a child's safety. From time to time, staff have had cause to register concerns and, when this has happened, records show that all the proper processes have been followed.

Pupils are taught about how to manage everyday risks, such as crossing the road or using the internet. There is a pupil-led e-safety council which has organised poster competitions to alert pupils to ways to stay safe online. 'Hector the Protector', a dolphin icon, floats on the school's computer screens and reminds pupils what to do in certain online situations.

Pupils report that they feel safe in school and say that if any unkind or rough behaviour happens then it is stopped by the teachers. The school site is secure and well maintained and supervision arrangements at break times and the beginning and end of the school day work well. Staff on playground duty wear brightly coloured jackets to make them stand out so pupils can spot them quickly if they need help.

Information about pupils with medical needs is shared with staff and there is clear written guidance about what staff need to know and do. First-aid treatment is readily available when needed and staff have received appropriate training.

Inspection findings

- As reported by the previous inspection, most children start school with a level of knowledge and skill in line with that typical for their age. Good communication between the school's Reception class staff and local pre-school providers assists a smooth start to school. For the most part, children are quick to settle and respond with keen enthusiasm to the effective teaching provided. Teaching staff are calm and caring and keep children productively occupied in a safe and stimulating environment.
- The early years curriculum has an appropriate focus on key literacy and numeracy skills and enables children to acquire effective learning habits that endure as they move up through the school. Staff are equally attentive to making sure children get the chance to laugh, marvel and wonder. During this inspection, for example, children and adults were captivated by ducklings hatching from eggs in the classroom. It was a magical and memorable moment that prompted much thought and worthwhile discussion. Indeed, the quality of the early years provision means that children are well prepared for learning in key stage 1. Published data shows that the proportions of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year have been above national figures for the past three years and have risen year after year. This is a positive picture.
- Teaching in the rest of the school builds further on this strong start. So much so that, in most years, standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 have been above national figures, sometimes, significantly so. That said, in 2016, when assessment arrangements changed, the proportion of pupils reaching the newly introduced greater depth standard, while above the national figure for both reading and mathematics, was much lower in writing. In response, you have been quick to act. Firstly, you examined the reasons why this happened. You and your team are confident that assessment in the school is accurate and my checks led me to agree with you. You are equally confident that some of the most able pupils should have reached higher standards in writing. You are making sure this happens. My examination of work in pupils' books found that your work to lift expectations and standards higher is working. Pupils are given clear and helpful guidance about how to improve their written work and their efforts and successes are recognised. Around the school, examples of good-quality writing are displayed with care and pupils clearly take pride in their work.
- Current work and assessment information indicates that standards at the end of Year 2 will be higher this year. Across the school, the focus on getting the best from the most able pupils is proving to be successful. I am satisfied that this aspect of school improvement is fully in hand. However, you are not resting on your laurels. While recent key stage 1 published data for mathematics presents favourably against national standards, you know that some pupils are capable of doing even better. Again, your key focus is the most able pupils and your checks on teaching and staff training hone in on this.
- It is clear that some mathematics teaching is highly effective. In the Years 3 and 4 class, for example, the quality of teacher questioning seen during this inspection was superb. The teacher pitched simple but highly engaging open-ended questions that immediately gripped pupils' thinking and got them talking

about fractions. By listening carefully, the teacher was able to refine his teaching to pupils' different needs and make sure that everyone was purposefully occupied by work at just the right level. The teacher's well-judged ability to ask rather than tell and use of on-the-spot assessment to shape teaching there and then shone out and pupils raced ahead in their learning. You make sure staff learn from this sort of effective practice. Indeed, the supportive teamwork in the school means that all readily share practice and are keen to learn from one another's strengths. Already, teachers in all classes use questioning in increasingly effective ways in order to prompt pupils to think hard and explain their reasoning. Nevertheless, in some instances, the brightest pupils could clearly cover more ground in lessons or be pushed onto more complex work.

- The breadth of the school curriculum is a significant strength. Around the school, colourful displays celebrate pupils' achievements in many different subjects. Pupils regularly make visits to places of interest and teachers inject imagination and infectious enthusiasm into classroom work. Pupils in all classes regularly sing, dance, investigate, build, draw, paint, act, research, study and create. In fact, whether working out the purpose of religious artefacts, rehearsing for a school performance, considering life as a servant in a country manor or exploring in the school's forest school area, pupils of all abilities enjoy learning and experience feelings of success.
- Pupils behave very well. In lessons, they are attentive and responsive. They work hard, respect one another's ideas and readily take part in all the activities on offer. On the playground, they get along with others and help out with jobs. In the past, some parents have expressed concerns about incidents of bullying. This is clearly evident from responses to the school's own questionnaires and a few responses on Parent View. The parents I spoke with on the playground, the vast majority of recent responses to Parent View and my own conversations with pupils and observations all led me to form a very positive view about behaviour and the school's attitude towards bullying. It is rare but it can happen. If it does, then it is challenged and stopped. Importantly, pupils are taught about respect, how to behave towards others and how to act in different situations in order to stay safe. In fact, pupils themselves have a significant say in shaping aspects of school policy, including the code of conduct for behaviour. They know that their ideas and views will be listened to and that adults will always help them if needs be. On top of this, the school's values are promoted loudly and clearly. Fictional characters such as Kind Katie and Peter Perseverance highlight the importance of different qualities and staff act as excellent role models.
- In recent years, attendance rates have bobbed up and down but, overall, have followed an upward trend. Last year, attendance overall was almost in line with the national average. This year to date, figures look to be better again. In addition, the number of pupils who regularly miss school has reduced. The school's work to remind parents and pupils about the importance of regular attendance is clearly paying off. Incentives such as the school's attendance bear, awarded to the class with the best attendance each week, and individual rewards for improved attendance, have also helped. Of course, some unavoidable absence cannot be helped. Even so, a small number of pupils do continue to miss too much school without good cause and this hinders their learning.

- Governance is informed, evaluative and operates strategically and efficiently. Governors have been forward thinking in the way they have managed recent staff changes and are very active in their support for the school. They are suitably informed about teaching and learning and ambitious for all pupils to do as well as possible.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils reach the highest possible standards, especially in mathematics, by:
 - ensuring that staff make the best possible use of assessment information to pitch work that moves pupils on when they are ready
 - making sure all staff continue to observe and learn from effective practice in this and other schools
- school leaders continue to work with parents to reduce any unnecessary absence from school.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Pye
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the permanent headteacher and teaching staff. I also met with the school's administrator and several governors, including the chair of governors. I carried out short observations of teaching in all year groups, looked at pupils' work in books and on display and saw pupils practising for a musical performance and playing sport. I talked with pupils in lessons and at breaktime and heard some pupils read in class. I spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day.

I paid particular attention to several key lines of enquiry. These included progress since the previous inspection, the level of challenge provided for the most able pupils, attendance, safeguarding, and the quality of leadership and management.

By the end of the inspection, there were 34 recent responses on Parent View and 21 written comments. There were 11 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and 60 responses to the pupil questionnaire. I took account of these responses and

talked with some pupils and parents about how school staff seek their views. I looked at a number of documents, including: pupils' progress information; the school's own evaluation of its performance; improvement plans; information about the work of the governing body; leaders' written reports to governors; records of checks on the quality of teaching and learning and several school policy documents. I also checked the school's website and the procedures for keeping pupils safe. I asked members of staff, pupils and parents about safeguarding matters.