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Mrs Katie Kendall
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Kendall

Short inspection of The Bellbird Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 March 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 June 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

You have brought energy and innovation to the school, building a strong new team. You have identified strengths in staff and developed leadership capacity. The school is living up to its slogan, 'soaring to success'. New monitoring arrangements that focus on one year group at a time enable leaders to gain a wealth of knowledge about the quality of education and the progress of individual pupils. This means that leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas to improve. They have selected the right priorities to focus upon and are driving improvement with resolution.

The progress of pupils has improved considerably over the past 18 months, as teaching has become more consistent. In 2018, the school's key stage 2 pupil progress measure was among the top 10% of schools in reading and mathematics. Attainment also improved. The proportion of Year 6 pupils who reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined was well above the national average.

Children in the early years enjoy a rich and varied curriculum that prepares them well for learning in Year 1. Activities include making mud curd in the kitchen outside and fishing for ping-pong balls with sounds written on them. Children are happy and

socialise well. They form their letters correctly and are beginning to string them into words.

The school has maintained the strengths reported in the previous inspection report and addressed the areas to improve, such as writing. Pupils behave very well. They are polite and eager to talk about their learning. They present their work neatly and have very positive attitudes to learning. Teachers have high expectations of pupils, ensuring that learning takes place in a calm, purposeful atmosphere. Pupils read confidently. The younger children sound out difficult words. Pupils enjoy using the school's refurbished and well-stocked library, which is located centrally for ease of access.

Parents and carers are very supportive of the school and the changes you have introduced. One said: 'This is a very positive and engaging school.' They value the Parent Forum, where they can make their views known. For example, they welcome the changes to home learning, which give pupils much more choice and make tasks more relevant to the current topic. Parents say that communication has improved. They like the 'mobile-friendly' website and the school's use of social media to inform them about what is going on.

Governors bring a wide range of skills and enthusiasm to the school. They are interested and curious, holding leaders to account for standards and linking with subject leaders on a regular basis. Governors ensure that the pupil premium is well spent and that the school provides value for money. They sponsor prizes for writing and handwriting, which are eagerly contested.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school has a culture where pupils feel safe and where vulnerable pupils are well supported. All legal requirements are met. Leaders ensure that adults are suitable to work in the school and that records are kept up to date. All concerns are logged and any patterns noted. Leaders are active in making sure that children receive the help they need. Pupils feel safe in the school and parents are happy that their children are well supported. All school staff receive safeguarding training. They know what to do if they have any concerns about the welfare of a pupil. Leaders work closely with external agencies for the benefit of pupils and their families.

Inspection findings

- In order to make sure the school remains good, I identified a number of key lines of enquiry, which we agreed at our initial meeting. First, I considered what leaders are doing to ensure that all disadvantaged pupils make the progress they should. This was because there had been some variation in the past.
- Teachers know the disadvantaged pupils in their classes well. Regular pupil-progress meetings ensure that these pupils' needs are reviewed and actions taken to support them where necessary. A new approach to helping pupils has strengthened progress. This involves teaching staff using their assessments of how pupils are doing in a lesson to provide immediate support the same day.

A third of the school's disadvantaged pupils have joined mid-year from other schools or with no previous education. Some of these pupils have additional needs. The school's data, confirmed by work in pupils' books, shows that the longer pupils remain in the school the more progress they make and the better their attainment.

- Leaders use the pupil premium funding to strengthen teaching through providing specialist training to staff and buying in support such as counselling. The school also makes sure that disadvantaged pupils do not miss out on the activities other pupils enjoy, such as breakfast club and horse riding. Published performance information and work in pupils' books show that the progress of disadvantaged pupils is good from their starting points and differences between their attainment and that of other pupils are reducing. Even so, disadvantaged pupils do not attend school regularly. They miss crucial learning time, which makes it more difficult for them to catch up.
- Next, I considered what you are doing to improve progress and raise standards in writing, especially for the most able. Historically, progress in writing has not been as strong as in reading and mathematics, and writing was an area to improve at the previous inspection.
- Leaders have placed great emphasis on improving pupils' vocabulary through introducing 'spotlight words'. These are specific words that pupils learn to help them understand their topics and to enrich their writing. For example, Year 2 pupils used 'heartbroken' and 'ecstatic' when writing about emotions. As pupils' vocabulary has widened, they find reading comprehension easier and their writing becomes more engaging. The approach to teaching writing across the school is consistent and includes pupils editing their work. Regular visits by authors inspire pupils and bring books to life. Year 1 pupils were writing letters to a local author, asking him questions.
- The most able pupils produce work of a high quality, which is beautifully presented. Teachers have high expectations of what they can achieve. For example, in Year 5 pupils wrote stories about a shipwreck that were compelling and dramatic. In Year 6, to accompany an evocative illustration from the First World War, a pupil wrote, 'Hear the muffled screams of a dying friend, his red ink writing death on the broken ground'.
- Finally, we considered what leaders and governors are doing to ensure that the curriculum is rich and varied and enables pupils to apply their skills in meaningful ways. Leaders and governors have undertaken a full review of the curriculum. This has included setting out clearly the knowledge, skills and vocabulary that will be taught across all subjects in each year group. The review has enabled teachers to consider how to inspire pupils and create memorable experiences.
- Already the curriculum is vibrant and dynamic. In Year 5, a topic on Japan led to an exploration of volcanoes inspired by Mount Fuji and meticulous paintings of cherry blossom in the Japanese style. The school's airy and light atrium celebrates pupils' achievements, including examples of home-learning projects. These include rainforest scenes, Viking armour and miniature gardens. Pupils take a pride in their work and have opportunities to apply their skills across a range of subjects. For example, Year 6 pupils wrote 'the journey of a raindrop'

when learning about the water cycle.

- The curriculum is enriched extensively through a wide range of clubs, visits and visitors. These include a science club run by governors, which invites renowned scientists to run workshops, a sewing club using sewing machines and a gardening club helping in the school's allotment. Pupils grow wheat each year, which they thresh and grind and make into loaves that are presented at the Harvest Festival and donated to local families. Apart from taking in the rich heritage of Cambridge itself, including the Fitzwilliam Museum and the Botanical Gardens, pupils visit other places of interest such as Colchester Castle and the Science Museum. A local resident also opens up her Tudor home for pupils to study.
- When I looked at examples of pupils' topic work, I found that sometimes teachers do not challenge pupils sufficiently. They set tasks in different subjects that are undemanding, such as colouring in or cutting and sticking, when pupils are capable of undertaking more complex work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the attendance of disadvantaged pupils improves to match that of other pupils
- teachers consistently provide sufficient challenge when setting work for pupils in different subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Nick Butt
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other school leaders and five governors, including the chair of the governing body. I met with pupils, who shared their work with me and read to me. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. We visited all classrooms and looked at pupils' books. I examined a range of documents, policies and assessment information. I considered 66 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View and 60 free-text responses. I spoke to parents in the playground before school.