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Mr Jim Johnson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Johnson

Short inspection of Edwards Hall Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 May 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 June 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Academic standards remain above national expectations, and parents and pupils think very highly of both the school and your leadership. Along with your senior leadership team and governors, you evaluate the school accurately. You celebrate the many strengths of the school and show a clear determination to bring about further improvement. You have, rightly, identified mathematics and the assessment of subjects other than English and mathematics as school priorities. You are also working hard to raise the level of challenge for the most able pupils in mathematics across key stage 2.

You provide strong leadership, which has led the school from strength to strength. You have set out a clear vision for educational excellence that is shared by staff and governors. Leadership is fully distributed across the school. Leaders at all levels are proud to be part of the school team. New initiatives, such as changing the start of the school day routine, are constantly evaluated for impact. You have established an outward-looking school, which is reflected in your work with other schools in the locality, and with universities. The local authority draws on the high levels of expertise in your school to support leaders in other schools, for example in the development of effective leadership teams.

Pupils like their school a lot and talk with great enthusiasm about the positive impact of teaching on their learning and well-being. Pupils are confident, friendly and enthusiastic. They are rightly proud of their school and feel very safe and well cared for. Parents are equally positive about the school and praise the care

provided and your leadership. One parent said: 'I am extremely happy with the standard of learning at the school. Both of my children have made excellent progress.' Parents also appreciate how well their children are helped to learn, including those pupils with any specific needs. One parent, whose views were typical of many, said: 'Her class teacher has been wonderful and gone above and beyond to help her and us.'

Governors are actively involved in the school and have a thorough understanding of its strengths and areas for development. They are committed to further improvement and provide you with consistent and effective levels of support and challenge.

Children make strong progress in the early years and are well prepared for entry into Year 1. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development continues to be above average. Pupils attain above-average standards, in all subjects, at the end of key stage 1. The proportion of pupils who reach the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 is also above average. More pupils are now attaining the higher standards in these subjects. However, you acknowledge that progress in mathematics needs to improve further.

Pupils' behaviour was very good during the inspection. Your pupils were polite and courteous to me, their peers and adults alike. You have developed a school with a positive atmosphere and ethos. Pupils benefit from this working environment and say that they enjoy attending school and that behaviour is very good. Pupils were keen to tell me that bullying is rare but when it does take place adults deal with it swiftly and it stops. Your staff are quick to manage the very few cases of low-level disruption so that learning continues at a brisk pace.

Although achievement across the school in mathematics is currently good, pupils' progress is not as rapid as it is in writing. You are also aware that there are times when the level of challenge does not stretch the most able pupils sufficiently to enable them to achieve even higher standards. This is especially the case across key stage 2, where expectations of what pupils can achieve vary.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and pupils are provided with a range of opportunities to develop their skills across the curriculum. A range of subjects were observed throughout the school. Themes such as: 'On the shoulders of giants', 'From farm to fork' and 'May the force be with you' inspire and enthuse pupils to achieve within subjects other than English and mathematics. The school is developing an assessment tool that will be used by teachers to track the progress of pupils within the foundation subjects. You are aware that this is not yet routinely used by teachers.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have rightly placed the well-being of pupils at the heart of the school so there is a strong culture of safeguarding embraced by staff and pupils alike. Leaders ensure that all staff and governors are trained to recognise the signs that could

indicate that a pupil might be at risk. All understand and follow the clear procedures in place for recording any concerns. When the need arises, senior leaders engage the support and expertise of external agencies to secure pupils' well-being.

The curriculum provides many opportunities for pupils to learn about how to be safe in a range of situations, including when on the road, around strangers and online. Pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of the risks they face when using technology and how to avoid them.

You and your staff know the pupils and their families very well and this is a real strength of the school. Relationships are positive and help pupils to feel safe. All staff who completed their questionnaire, and the overwhelming majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, agree that the school keeps pupils safe.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry focused on how well the school has addressed the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Progress in writing has been consistently strong for the past two years. From an early age pupils are encouraged to write for a purpose and an audience. Initiatives such as 'story scribing' are used well to develop pupils' understanding of the writing process. As a result of the effective teaching of writing across the school, writing is a strength of the school.
- Pupils' progress in reading has improved over the past two years as a result of leaders' actions to address the lower than expected progress score in 2016. Pupils now read widely and often and read challenging texts, which has improved their comprehension skills considerably. Pupils value the opportunity to read more challenging texts and thoroughly enjoy taking part in the 'Accelerated Reader Programme'. Leaders have reviewed the teaching of reading and have made effective changes to how reading is taught. Parents have been involved in this process and have been provided with workshops and information about how to support their children at home.
- My second line of enquiry centred on how well leaders and those responsible for mathematics are ensuring that progress continues to improve across key stage 2, especially for disadvantaged pupils. The mathematics leader has a precise understanding of pupils' strengths and weaknesses and any gaps in their learning. He has worked effectively with teachers to address these areas, for example through the use of resources to support all pupils. As a result, pupils are now making at least good progress in mathematics.
- Leaders have placed a strong focus on developing pupils' number and place value skills, and this has proved successful. However, reasoning and problem-solving skills have not improved at the same rate. Across key stage 2, the most able pupils' progress in mathematics is not accelerated because staff do not challenge pupils' thinking sufficiently. Pupils commented that they would like more challenge

in mathematics, with one stating, 'We need to be pushed so that our brains do not switch off.' As a result, they do not make the progress that they are capable of.

- Disadvantaged pupils' progress in mathematics is also improving. The school helps these pupils overcome the difficulties they face by tailoring support and help to their individual needs. Analysis of work books shows that pupils eligible for the pupil premium grant receive supportive and detailed feedback, in line with the school's policy, which is enabling them to make good progress at the same rate as their peers.
- My third line of enquiry to establish whether the school remains good focused on leaders' actions to improve the progress of middle- and high-attaining pupils. Leaders regularly track pupils' progress in English and mathematics. This has allowed teachers to become more aware of pupils' prior attainment and improved their awareness of what pupils are capable of achieving. Where progress is not as it should be, senior leaders and teachers work together to improve outcomes. Pupils' work books show that progress over time is at least good for these pupils across key stage 2. Where the teaching is highly effective, middle- and high-attaining pupils are making strong progress. However, leaders are aware that there is more work to do to improve the consistency of challenge in mathematics.
- My final focus during the inspection was the attendance of persistently absent pupils. In 2017, the percentage of pupils who were persistently absent rose. The school supports families effectively to ensure that their children attend school on a regular basis. Leaders and governors review absence figures regularly in order to have a comprehensive understanding for the reasons behind each child's absence. The school works very cooperatively and effectively with the local authority to ensure that pupils attend school regularly. As a result, there has been an improvement in the attendance of this group of pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers have consistently high expectation of what pupils, particularly the most able, can achieve in mathematics across key stage 2, and consequently provide a good level of challenge to all so that outcomes improve
- teachers use an agreed assessment and tracking system, in subjects other than English and mathematics, to enable them to systematically measure pupils' progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Joseph Figg
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with you and your senior leadership team, school governors and a representative from the local authority. I spoke to a group of pupils as well as individual pupils and members of staff around the school.

We made visits to lessons to observe pupils' learning and conducted several learning walks around the school. We also looked at pupils' books across a range of ages and abilities as well as information from the school's assessment system.

I scrutinised a range of documentary evidence, which included the school's self-evaluation, records of pupil behaviour, current progress information and pupil attendance information. I evaluated safeguarding referrals and child protection records, including the single central record. I also looked at the school's website.

In addition, I took account of 120 responses to the Parent View online survey and 115 free-text comments from parents. I also analysed 27 responses from the staff questionnaire.