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Miss Clare Reynolds
Headteacher
Larkwood Primary School
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Dear Miss Reynolds

Short inspection of Larkwood Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 2018 with Anna Sutton, 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have set high expectations for what pupils can achieve. These expectations are based upon mutual respect. The school motto exemplifies this: 'no harm to others'. One of the strengths of the school is the pupils' attitudes to learning. They work hard to support each other. They are also polite and resilient, and take a pride in their school.

You provide clear direction for the school's future improvement, based upon the school's core values. These encourage all pupils to display the following behaviours: 'courage, trust, enjoyment, partnership, equality and excellence'. Parents spoken to are very supportive of the school. They recognise your teachers are 'approachable' and 'available' to support their child. Comments such as 'My daughter is excited to come to school' and 'I am never fobbed off' are typical of many parents' and carers' views. The core values seek to ensure that your pupils have ambition, enjoy school and are successful learners. You focus on academic success but the opportunities for pupils to participate in a range of additional activities demonstrate that this is a strength too.

You appreciate that you serve a community and have created a learning environment that promotes your core values. This is enhanced by the close collaboration with other schools in the trust. Your curriculum meets the needs of all your pupils because you are constantly reviewing its effectiveness.

You have established an effective senior leadership team. You have created a leadership team that is determined to do the best for all the pupils in the school.

Together, you have led the improvements in teaching. You have improved the performance of girls in mathematics and the quality of handwriting that were identified in the last report. Children in the early years make good progress given their starting points and capabilities. Leaders rightly identified that outcomes in reading are less successful than writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6. You put in place a full range of strategies to support pupils in the classroom and in additional sessions. This includes daily reading time in each class in Years 1 to 5; establishing a new library with many new books; and introducing an online resource that pupils can access at home to support their reading. You also look outside the school to research strategies that have been successful elsewhere. For example, you arranged a visit to a school which had significantly improved its reading results. This enabled you to implement a number of initiatives. Such strategies have been successful in improving progress for all pupils. The quality of teaching and learning continues to be a focus for the leadership team in their drive to ensure that classroom practice is consistently of a high quality. You recognise that there is still work to do to ensure that a greater proportion of pupils reach the expected and higher standards in reading by the end of Year 6. You agree that attendance is low and too many pupils are persistently absent.

Governors have a good understanding of the school. They have been directly involved in recent improvements, for example in supporting priorities through releasing additional funding. They use a range of information effectively to challenge school leaders. They ensure that their regular visits to school enable them to see first-hand the work of school leaders.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are effective and records are complete. All checks on the suitability of staff to work at the school are in place. Staff and governor training is up to date and this has covered how to spot when pupils may be at risk of radicalisation or female genital mutilation. Staff and governors understand the current guidance. They take this responsibility seriously and are effective at all levels. Staff know how to raise any concerns they have about a pupil's welfare using the comprehensive school system. Leaders work well with families and external agencies to ensure that pupils receive well-targeted support, as required. Your safeguarding team operates well to address any concerns about pupils' well-being.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when using online technology. Pupils spoken to say that their use of the internet is closely monitored by teachers. E-safety lessons help pupils understand how to manage risk online. Parents and pupils agree that the school is a safe place to learn.

Inspection findings

- I looked at the actions leaders are taking to ensure that the progress and attainment of pupils in reading improves. This was because in 2016 and 2017, progress in reading was low by the end of Year 6. In 2017 in key stage 1,

attainment was below the national average. Although pupils do well in their phonics screening at the end of Year 1, their progress in reading is not sustained through the school. The school has recognised this and ensuring that all pupils make good progress in their reading is a priority for leaders.

- Children in the Reception Year are taught phonics to improve their reading skills. Most-able children can sound out letters in their head and then say the word. Children work well with a partner to read simple sentences. Although they struggle with some challenging words, they use their knowledge of phonics to help them succeed. Year 2 pupils that inspectors heard read are making good progress in their reading. Their knowledge of phonics helps them pronounce unfamiliar words. Pupils can talk with confidence about their books. They can predict what might happen in a story. Most-able readers are able to choose their own books, encouraging independence and a love of reading. However, they do not always choose books that are sufficiently challenging.
- Year 6 pupils heard read all chose their own books. They are independent readers and read for pleasure. They all enjoy their reading because of 'fun facts' and 'You can lose yourself in a book – like a dream.' Pupils know a range of books and have their favourite authors. When stuck on a word, pupils persevere to make sense of the sentence. Pupils can talk about their favourite characters. One of the pupils we read with could confidently explain the plot of a story. She talked eloquently about 'Dumbledore' and 'how wise and good he is'.
- Additional strategies to support reading inside and outside the classroom are effective. These have rightly focused upon improving pupils' comprehension skills so that pupils can read for understanding. This is helping all pupils, especially older pupils, build upon their good understanding of phonics.
- For the second line of enquiry, I looked at how leaders' actions have helped improve attendance and reduce the proportion of persistent absentees. This was because attendance has been below the national average from 2015 to 2017. Leaders acknowledge this. They have identified attendance as a priority in the school improvement plan. Leaders have high expectations and have ensured that strategies are in place for attendance to improve.
- Throughout the school, there are displays to encourage attendance. The school regularly celebrates those pupils with full attendance. A recently produced school leaflet, 'Attendance Matters – Get your child to school every day', reminds parents of their responsibilities. The school has used additional funding provided by governors to employ external support to improve attendance. There is a greater emphasis on working closely with parents when their children first start school.
- The senior leadership team monitors attendance information and ensures that low attendance is followed up. The school analyses its attendance information alongside progress information. However, this analysis is insufficiently detailed to focus on specific groups, especially disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. There have been some individual successes; however, attendance remains below the national average.
- Finally, we agreed to look at how the school's curriculum enables all pupils to make good progress. This was because in 2016 and 2017 some groups of pupils

did better than others, particularly girls at the end of Year 6. Leaders are aware of the need to focus on boys' progress. Consequently, the quality of texts has been reviewed to ensure that they are appealing to boys. The school has worked with an external adviser, specialising in gender gaps. This has led to additional strategies being introduced to engage all pupils, particularly boys, for example 'hooks to learning', which enable the teacher to follow a pupil's interests.

- Teachers are aware of the needs of all their pupils. They plan together to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met. Evidence from classroom visits shows that all adults are making a difference to pupils' learning. For example, in the Reception Year all children are engaged in purposeful activities. Both boys and girls are involved in playing and exploring, for example in construction activities. Adults work hard to encourage both boys and girls to participate fully in all the areas of learning. This demonstrates that from an early age the school is emphasising gender equal opportunities. In Year 3 mathematics lessons, boys and girls are equally represented at all levels of ability. Evidence from books seen shows that there is no gender difference in the progress they make. In Year 6, all pupils are engaged in writing a dialogue. There are high expectations for all pupils, who use their targets to help them improve their writing. Good questioning challenges thinking. Pupils are encouraged to use their 'learning muscles' emphasising 'reasoning' and 'perseverance'. In mathematics lessons, all pupils work well and make progress in their understanding of, for example, fractions or shape and algebra.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- overall attendance improves and persistent absence reduces for all pupils and especially key groups
- pupils choose books that challenge them so that they make rapid progress in their reading.

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

Yours sincerely

Richard Barnes
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we carried out the following activities:

- met with the headteacher and senior leaders
- held meetings with members of the governing body, chair and chief education officer of the multi-academy trust board
- met with the school's improvement partner
- listened to pupils read
- met with groups of pupils
- met with a group of parents
- reviewed a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans and information about pupil progress and attendance
- scrutinised a range of pupils' work
- reviewed the school's single central record, pre-employment checks and safeguarding procedures
- scrutinised the school's website
- considered 77 responses to Ofsted's online survey and Parent View
- considered 45 responses to the pupil survey
- visited lessons in classes with members of the leadership team.