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Mrs Alex Evans
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Dear Mrs Evans

Short inspection of Pixmore Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 11 June 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 September 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your leaders provide a safe and inclusive environment where pupils' individual needs are met, helping them to thrive both academically and socially. Pupils are at the heart of the school's work. The school's values, 'Include, Achieve, Aspire', are delivered through the 'Pixmore Way' and repeated regularly by pupils and adults alike. The values underpin the school's well-thought-out curriculum and help pupils to achieve their best.

Leaders enjoy the respect of staff, where a strong team ethic has been developed and sustained. Staff consider that leaders listen to their views when new ideas are introduced. Staff feel that they are well supported. This ensures that there is a shared understanding of what leaders intend to achieve through their actions. All staff who responded to the Ofsted survey were proud to be a member of the school team, with one saying, 'The leadership team makes the school a happy place to work.'

Leaders, including governors, know the school well. At the previous inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that they strengthened their focus on securing improvement for the most important priorities. You have established a robust system of monitoring and use the information successfully to check the school's performance. Leaders identify improvement priorities accurately and plan appropriate actions. Leaders provide governors with useful information, who use it well to challenge and hold school leaders to account. Some school plans, such as the pupil premium strategy, do not make clear the impact leaders expect to see and how success will be measured. This means that governors are not able to check whether actions have been achieved in a timely manner.

Your leaders were also asked to ensure that the work given to less-able pupils provided the right level of challenge to help them to catch up in their learning. Published information since the previous inspection shows that the expected standards have remained below national averages. This is because it has taken time to embed the new strategies your leaders have adopted to improve the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics. You have made changes to teaching arrangements and ensured that adults who support different groups are well trained. Leaders make regular checks on pupils' progress so that teaching is adapted and interventions provided to ensure that pupils' gaps in learning are addressed. The national test results in 2018 show that these changes are having a positive impact. Pupils' attainment and progress are on an upward trend. Work in pupils' books and the school's own current information demonstrate that this progress is being sustained, especially for the less able pupils.

Leaders work hard to build trust among parents and carers to help them engage with their children's learning. Your leaders have established good relationships with parents. Parents value what the school provides, and the overwhelming majority say that their children are happy to go to school and are making good progress. Parents welcome the nurturing and caring environment. As one parent commented on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, 'All the teachers and support staff are wonderful and really seem to know the children. I really feel like they care about my child as an individual.' This comment was typical of other views expressed.

Pupils like their school and are very proud of it. They told the inspector that there was nothing that could improve their school. Pupils enjoy positive relationships with adults, whom they consider to be firm but fair. Pupils work hard during their lessons and demonstrate good attitudes to learning. They understand that the 'Pixmore Way' helps them to behave well, respect one another and to develop their confidence and resilience in learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team ensures that all the necessary safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Leaders work closely with family pastoral workers to ensure that pupils receive the appropriate support to keep them safe. Leaders are tenacious in their approach and continually review all safeguarding information to check that processes and policies are used correctly by staff. Leaders are prepared to 'go the extra mile'. They provide additional support that helps vulnerable pupils to be safe while in their care. Pre-employment checks for those who work or volunteer in the school are fully in place. Governors keep a watchful eye to ensure that records are well maintained.

Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe both inside and out of school. They are regularly reminded about using the internet safely. Leaders are mindful about the local risks in the community and teach pupils about the dangers associated with gangs and criminal exploitation (county lines). Pupils say that bullying is not a problem at this school, but understand the different forms it could take. Pupils have opportunities to share any worries with members of staff and are confident that adults will listen to them and resolve their concerns.

Inspection findings

- Year 6 pupils' progress in reading was well below average in 2016 and 2017. In 2018, there was an improvement and progress in reading was average. However, pupils' attainment in reading in 2018 remained below the national averages at the expected and higher standards. I wanted to check whether leaders' actions were sustaining improvement and helping to raise standards across the school.
- Leaders have introduced new approaches to improve the teaching of reading. Whole-class texts are used to develop pupils' fluency and develop their skills of comprehension. Adults model expression by reading extracts out loud. Pupils are encouraged to repeat this by using their 'performance voice' to develop their intonation. This helps them to gain a deeper understanding into the meaning and content of the text. During group reading, pupils are provided with frameworks to help them analyse, reflect and respond to questions to develop their reading skills. The level of challenge is adjusted to meet the needs of all the pupils. For example, the most able pupils in Year 6 made use of the poem 'Jabberwocky' to identify nonsense words. They then created their own nonsense vocabulary to provide a different context for the poem.
- Pupils love to read at Pixmore. They are provided with opportunity to read quietly and for sustained periods. They talk confidently about their favourite authors and about what they are reading. The well-stocked reading areas provide pupils with a range of different books that appeal to their interests. Leaders are continuing to develop pupils' enjoyment by raising the profile of reading, such as joint schemes with the town's library and introducing book swaps.
- Leaders have ensured that there are appropriate materials to support those who struggle with their reading. However, these pupils still lack confidence when reading because they are not secure with their use of phonics to support their skills of decoding. Home-school reading diaries show that there are insufficient opportunities to practise their skills and develop their fluency. This is hampering the progress these pupils are making.
- Next, I wanted to explore whether leaders were making effective use of the pupil premium to support the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have a great knowledge of individual pupils and have ensured that the actions taken address pupils' learning and emotional needs. Your leaders make use of pastoral workers to provide support for vulnerable pupils and their families. Opportunities to talk and share concerns ensure that pupils are better placed and ready to learn. This means that disadvantaged pupils benefit from the additional support for their learning. Teaching assistants have received appropriate coaching and training so that they can support pupils of all abilities more effectively. Pupils' work in books shows that they are making strong gains in their learning, which is helping to diminish the differences in their achievement.
- Finally, I wanted to see whether leaders have improved pupils' writing skills, especially in spelling, punctuation and grammar. This was an area for improvement identified at the previous inspection. The published information for 2018 showed that standards in spelling remained below the national average.
- Following the previous inspection, leaders initially introduced a whole-school approach to spelling, where pupils were taught spelling strategies in different groups. Leaders quickly identified that while pupils learned lists of spellings, they were not using them within their work. This is because class teachers were not reinforcing the spelling pupils had

learned.

- Leaders introduced new approaches. Teachers now provide regular spelling lessons for their own group of pupils. Training has been provided and this ensures that there is a consistent approach. This is also linked to developing pupils' range of vocabulary. Teachers spend greater time checking pupils' understanding of important words that they use in their learning. Pupils' writing books show fewer mistakes in spelling. Pupils are starting to make greater use of editing skills to correct their errors. However, teachers do not have the same high expectations for pupils' writing in other subjects. Pupils do not apply their skills consistently and make repeated errors in their spelling and punctuation.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers have high expectations for how pupils apply their skills of spelling and punctuation when writing in subjects other than English
- pupils are secure with their use of phonics so that the less able pupils make stronger progress in reading
- strategic plans for disadvantaged pupils make clear the precise measures by which success will be measured.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Mellors
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and other leaders in the school. I spoke with a group of governors, including the vice-chair of the governing body. I considered staff views from the online survey. I observed learning jointly with you and other senior leaders. I met with groups of pupils and heard them read. I scrutinised a selection of the pupils' workbooks with senior leaders. I examined a range of the school's documentation, including its self-evaluation document, improvement plan and documents related to safeguarding. I considered the views of parents by analysing the 80 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. I also took note of 57 free-text responses to Ofsted's parent questionnaire.