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Mr Emmanuel Keteku
Laycock Primary School
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Dear Mr Keteku

Short inspection of Laycock Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 1 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 previous inspection. As the newly appointed headteacher, soon after the inspection, you quickly worked on developing a new vision for the school and on 'refreshing' the building. With the exception of the restructuring of the support staff, there have been few staff changes under your leadership.

You have worked very well with senior and middle leaders, including governors, to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. These included raising the already good quality of teaching and improving aspects of standards at key stage 1. A further action point was with regard to pupils' attendance, which remains a challenge to the school. This is evaluated as one of the three key lines of enquiry in the inspection findings.

Teaching is good across all phases at the school. This has contributed to pupils making consistently good progress year on year from a low base. You and other leaders have clear and rigorous systems for checking on teachers' work. However, as we discussed, observations of teaching do not focus sharply on its impact on pupils' learning. You link this monitoring well to the school improvement plan and the performance management of teachers. You provide staff with guidance and opportunities to improve their skills. The impact of good and improving teaching is evident in the above-average proportion of pupils that attained greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1.

Your leadership team checks pupils' progress well, making very good use of the school's new tracking system. This enables leaders to analyse a range of assessment information and to identify the pastoral and academic support that pupils need to develop their learning.

You have worked with staff, governors, pupils and other partners to create a calm and welcoming school where pupils live the school's values of 'kindness' and 'unity'. Parents recognise and appreciate the work that you and your staff do to develop their children's learning. One parent commented that the school is, 'a place in which children thrive and mix with others'. This is illustrated well in the way in which you have all successfully incorporated the provision for pupils who are deaf with mainstream classes. Parents are right in seeing the provision for pupils who are deaf as a symbolic asset of all that the school stands for. Regardless of pupils' starting points or disability, you ensure that Laycock pupils have equality of opportunity to achieve well.

Safeguarding is effective

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Senior leaders and governors fulfil statutory duties well to ensure that pupils are safe from harm and danger. You ensure that training is up to date and staff are familiar with the most recent statutory guidance. This includes coverage of national and local priorities such as extremism and child sexual exploitation. As a result, staff know and understand their responsibilities and carry them out extremely well. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding liaise closely with families and other external agencies where pupils are potentially at risk of harm. This ensures that they can access services offering early help quickly. In addition, the governors have invested very well in the appointment of a family liaison worker/education welfare officer who is responsible for pastoral matters, such as pupils' attendance and well-being.

Parents and pupils are assured that the school is a safe place. Pupils know the staff they can turn to if they are worried. Pupils are knowledgeable about how to keep safe when out of school because the curriculum covers a range of age-appropriate topics. The systems that you have for checking staff before appointing them are thorough.

Inspection findings

- To verify whether the school remains good, my first line of enquiry focused on pupils' attendance and the stubborn and high persistent absence of a few pupils. Your school improvement plan shows the gradual reduction in rates of absence over the last three academic years. However, low attendance persists and this remains an area for improvement.

- Discussions with you and other leaders responsible for improving attendance confirmed that you are willing to take stringent actions when necessary. Reasons for absence are known. It is clear that the school is sensitive to the needs of pupils who are unwell and have medical appointments, who account for the majority of absences. Other reasons are beyond the control of families. For example, many pupils are in temporary accommodation in different boroughs.
 - Legal action, and other measures that involve the family liaison worker, have led to more parents ensuring that their child attends school regularly. As a result, there has been a gradual reduction in the number of unauthorised absences. Nevertheless, you recognise that there is more to do before attendance reaches the national average for primary schools.
 - The second line of enquiry was about the actions taken by the school to improve the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in phonics at the end of Years 1 and 2. The school has a clear approach to developing early reading skills. The systematic approach to teaching phonics ensures that children in Reception are assessed within the first term at school and targeted support is provided, linked to their needs. The school has invested well in a phonics scheme and worked closely with the author to implement it thoroughly. As a result, pupils are making good progress.
 - Other changes include modifying the way in which teachers support pupils who need extra help. The small learning groups and additional support for pupils requiring extra tuition are working very well. Additionally, you have identified the barriers to pupils achieving well in reading, particularly those who are disadvantaged. You and your staff recognise that a larger than average proportion of pupils enter the school with complex needs and low starting points. Daily and unremitting extra support to improve reading skills has helped to develop avid readers who seek to overcome their weaknesses. This was evident when I listened to a group of pupils read.
 - The third line of enquiry considered pupils' progress in reading and mathematics in key stage 2. Our discussions took into consideration the impact on overall data of the few pupils from the resource-based provision. You have modified the curriculum and the approach to supporting pupils. Recent 'practice tests' over two terms show that the current cohorts are making rapid progress. This includes pupils from both the provision for pupils who are deaf and the mainstream classes. As a result, your assessment information shows that pupils are on track to achieve better outcomes.
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- The school's analysis of the 2016 key stage 2 national test papers revealed

that in literacy, pupils did not use punctuation, spelling and grammatical features accurately. In addition, pupils did not command a wide and varied vocabulary and use high-order reading skills consistently well to meet the demands of the more challenging test papers. In mathematics, problem-solving skills required further work. Observations of teaching, scrutiny of pupils' work and discussions with middle leaders indicate that these weaknesses are being tackled methodically and intensively. New reading texts and close analysis of a writer's use of language to convey meaning are improving pupils' skills. They are able to infer and make deductions to develop their comprehension skills. However, teachers do not consistently pay attention to technical errors to help pupils improve their work.

- Teaching in mathematics is now more focused on developing pupils' problem solving. Pupils are clear that they are 'really challenged in mathematics'.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they increase the attendance rates of the few pupils who do not attend regularly so that the overall attendance is at least in line with the national average
- they build on the strategies to develop early reading skills so that pupils are well prepared to attain and exceed expected standards in phonics in Year 1
- teaching and the curriculum help pupils to develop high-order reading and technical writing skills and mathematical problem-solving skills in key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held a number of meetings with you and other senior leaders. You and other senior leaders accompanied me on a series of short visits to lessons. I held a group discussion with five middle leaders with responsibilities for the curriculum, literacy, mathematics, school improvement and early years. I also held a meeting with you and the family liaison officer. I met with a representative of the governing body and we held a telephone discussion with the ex-chair of governors. I had a meeting with the director of learning from the local authority. Informal conversations took place with a few parents attending the family learning session. I spoke to pupils in lessons, scrutinised their books with senior and middle leaders, and met with members of the school council. I also listened to key stage 1 pupils reading. I looked at a range of documentation. This included the school's self-evaluation and summary improvement plans, external reviews of the school's work, minutes of governing body meetings, records of pupils' attainment, progress and behaviour, and evidence of records to keep pupils safe and on their attendance. I took into consideration 34 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey for parents.