

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mrs Claire Davies  
Executive headteacher  
Elmley Castle CofE First School  
Main Street  
Elmley Castle  
Persnore  
Worcestershire  
WR10 3HS

Dear Mrs Davies

### **Short inspection of Elmley Castle CofE First School**

Following my visit to the school on 31 January 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 October 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 took up your post in September 2016 following a period of turbulence within the school, including a change of staffing and a significant number of pupils leaving the school. Since your appointment, you have stabilised staffing and pupil mobility and provided the school with strong and focused leadership to ensure that pupils continue to achieve well.

Your determined leadership has drawn the whole school community together to work closely as one team. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. 'The nurturing and Christian ethos ensures all pupils thrive', was one example of many positive comments received from parents. Every parent spoken to, or who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire, praised every aspect of the school, and particularly the care their children receive from the staff.

Pupils are very proud of their school. For example, one pupil commented, 'We are a community and are friends with everyone.' Pupils enjoy taking part in activities such as sports tournaments and the 'Young Voices' singing event. They develop into confident, polite and respectful individuals. Pupils have a wide range of experiences to support their social, moral and spiritual development. For example, assemblies focus on teaching them about Christian values. However, pupils' understanding of other faiths, beliefs and cultures is less well developed.

At the time of the previous inspection, leaders and governors were asked to improve pupils' listening skills. Leaders have taken effective action to tackle this. Behaviour in lessons is exemplary and pupils readily give their views and contribute willingly to their learning. They listen to, and show respect for, one another's opinions. You have identified the school now needs to ensure that pupils develop a deeper understanding of what an effective learner is so they can challenge themselves even more.

Leaders and governors were also asked to improve the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics so pupils' achievement in the subject matches that in reading and writing. This has been successfully achieved. In 2016, achievement in mathematics exceeded that of reading and writing at the end of key stage 1. However, further work is needed to challenge the most able so they achieve the highest levels of which they are capable. Through rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning, you have correctly identified this. You have introduced new assessment systems to support teachers in identifying what pupils can do, and what they need to achieve next. You are also providing effective support and guidance to teachers to raise their expectations of what the most able pupils can achieve.

Sharply focused development plans, based on your accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, have led to rapid improvements in a short space of time. However, the leadership capacity is limited and is hindering the school making more rapid progress. You agree that this is an issue and the school is already taking action to expand the leadership capacity.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality. All staff understand the procedures that are in place and receive up-to-date training on safeguarding. New fencing and security doors were installed following a review of site security. Leaders have created a strong culture of safeguarding and recognise there is no room for complacency in relation to keeping pupils safe.

Pupils of all ages have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. For example, they learn how to carry tools safely in forest schools, how to cross the road and not to talk to strangers. Pupils also have a clear understanding of how to keep themselves safe online. During breaktimes, the older pupils look after and care for the younger ones. Pupils learn about anti-bullying and understand what bullying is. They say that bullying does not happen in their school, but are confident that it would be dealt with effectively if it did.

### **Inspection findings**

- The school has faced a number of challenges over the last two years which led to pupil numbers diminishing. However, under your leadership, along with the support of the governors, diocese and local authority, the school is now moving

forward positively. Pupil numbers are rising as parents recognise the quality of education the school offers.

- You have introduced effective systems to monitor the performance of teachers. These systems identify where further support is needed to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers appreciate the guidance and training they receive to help them improve their practice. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning is improving further. However, a key development area for teaching across the school is ensuring that pupils are challenged appropriately so they achieve their full potential. Through effective monitoring you have correctly identified this. Additional leadership capacity within the school is needed to further support and develop the quality of teaching and learning.
- Governors are a dedicated team and are committed to ensuring the best possible outcomes for all pupils. They understand the strengths of the school and work closely with you to develop clear action plans to address the areas for improvement. Governors know they have a responsibility to hold leaders to account for the performance of the school. They challenge you effectively and are committed to developing their roles further. A cycle of monitoring visits is set up, action plans and information about the achievement of pupils are reviewed regularly and further training is planned with the local authority.
- The local authority has been very effective at supporting the school's development. It has provided additional monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning to help identify areas for improvement, and support for the governing body.
- Pupils' attendance reflects their enjoyment of school and is above the national average. Pupils say they 'love' coming to school. All parents who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire said their child was happy in school. For groups whose attendance falls below national average, leaders take effective action to address this.
- Phonics is taught well and, therefore, pupils are able to use their phonic knowledge effectively in reading and writing activities. For example, some children in the early years could sound words out confidently to describe the pirates they had painted. Teachers identify children who are not making expected progress and support is put in place swiftly to help them catch up.
- All adults have very positive relationships with pupils. Teachers use assessment information to plan for pupils' needs and work in books demonstrates they are making good progress over time. Teaching assistants contribute effectively to pupils' learning. However, some pupils, especially the most able, are not consistently challenged and therefore do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Pupils are keen to learn and show great interest in the wide range of subjects they are taught. For example, class three pupils were very enthusiastic about the Egyptian project they studied in history. Although pupils are taught a rich and varied curriculum, their understanding of other faiths, beliefs and cultures is less secure.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the capacity of leadership and management is expanded to further develop the quality of teaching and learning
- teachers consistently provide greater challenge for pupils, especially the most able, to enable them to make further progress
- pupils have more opportunities to broaden and develop their understanding of different faiths, beliefs and cultures to deepen the values of respect and tolerance.

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

Yours sincerely

Ann Pritchard  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection I met with you, the head of school and eight members of the governing body. I had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. You joined me on brief visits to lessons. I talked to pupils about their learning and looked at examples of their work. I spoke to parents at the start of the day and to pupils at breaktime and in the breakfast club. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's own evaluation of its performance, the school development plan, documents relating to keeping pupils safe, attendance figures and the most recent information about pupils' achievement. I considered the responses from the Ofsted online questionnaire from parents, staff and pupils.

This inspection focused particularly on the effectiveness of the leadership and management in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning; how well phonics is taught; how well pupils are challenged in their learning; the attendance of pupils and the actions taken by leaders in response to the recommendations from the previous inspection.