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Mrs Fiona Wheatley
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Dear Mrs Wheatley

Short inspection of Sawtry Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 15 December 2015, 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 February 2011.

This school continues to be good.

Since the last inspection, the leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school. You have created a stable school community. Central to this has been your clear, day-to-day direction, which you have provided over many years. Your effective leadership is valued highly by the vast majority of parents and staff. This contributes to the positive and purposeful relationships seen across the school and with the on-site pre-school and junior school, and the children's centre. Senior leaders have a clear sense of purpose and share your commitment to ensure that all pupils achieve as well as they can.

There have been a number of changes since the last inspection. You have successfully managed the absence of key members of staff over a period of nearly two years. Recently, you have reviewed the roles and responsibilities of senior staff. Many of the senior leaders are relatively new to their roles, some as recently as September 2015. They are enthusiastic and committed but find that they do not always have sufficient time to carry out all of their duties. With your good support and that of the deputy headteacher, new and temporary members of staff have settled well. As a result, attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 has continued to be above the national average. You and other senior leaders have evaluated thoroughly and accurately what the school does well and what needs to be done to improve it

even further. You have paid particular attention to the development of the early years and, consequently, children are achieving well in the Reception year.

At the last inspection, inspectors commended the school for providing excellent care and a good curriculum that ensured that pupils make good progress in their personal development. The school has maintained these positive aspects. It is recognised by staff and parents that you often go above and beyond what is expected to ensure that not only pupils but also families are very well supported.

During the last inspection, the following areas for improvement were identified to accelerate pupils' progress: ensuring that teaching is always guided by high-quality, accurate assessment; using as accurate data as possible when checking on pupils' progress; developing the outside area in the early years; and improving the school's global and national links. On the whole, all these areas have been tackled successfully. Pupils enjoy learning that is well planned and inviting, particularly in the early years. Parents are very positive about the learning and care that takes place in the Reception classes.

Good teaching in all year groups means that increasing proportions of pupils make good progress. This is because assessments are accurate and teachers know their pupils well. Pupils mostly know their next steps in learning, but you agree that they are not always as clear as they could be about them in mathematics. You have also ensured that pupils have a good understanding of how others live through the carefully planned, themed learning opportunities in both religious education and the wider curriculum. All of the school's work has been shared comprehensively with the governing body. Individual governors are linked to priorities in the school's plan for improvement and are actively involved in checking the progress that is being made. Leaders are aware, however, that a few areas of the school are not as strong as you would wish. For example, the most-able pupils do not always make the progress of which they are capable. There is also some unevenness in pupils' progress between different classes. This is particularly the case in mathematics, where leadership of this subject is only recently being developed.

Part of the school's motto is 'to always do our best' and these high expectations are shared by pupils and staff alike. Everyone is working together to achieve the vision of becoming an even better school. The meetings you have put in place to check on pupils' progress are rigorous. Tracking the progress of individuals and of groups of pupils is a key feature of teachers' performance management as well as the expectations you are setting for the quality of their work.

The school's early years provision has improved considerably since the last inspection. The leader of the early years has developed a very effective working relationship with the on-site, but independently run, pre-school, from which the majority of the children transfer to your early years provision. This close working together has ensured that their learning is built upon and continues apace. Other

children come from a variety of providers with whom you also have good links. Because of this, teachers know the children well and plan activities that develop all children's learning. You have placed emphasis on boys' learning. The outside area is particularly inviting and exciting. The school has taken on aspects of becoming a Forest School, providing a forest garden, a climbing frame, a mud area and bird boxes. The children enjoy independently taking themselves out to this area, 'watching the birds feed' and 'getting really muddy!' The early years environment is rich in opportunities to develop children's language and independent writing. This has played a major part in the improving achievement at the end of the early years. During my visit, I saw children freely opting to write letters to one of their parents, make lists to help them to remember which presents they still needed to 'buy' for Christmas, and to make their own Christmas cards.

Staff and pupils alike excitedly told me about the work that the school now does to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of how other people live. International week is firmly established each year. Each class chooses a country that they want to travel to and an 'airport' is set up in the school hall. Teaching assistants and the Chair of the Friends of Sawtry Infant School become airline personnel for the day and act out the whole process of pupils going on holiday to their class's chosen country. Dressed in summer clothes, pupils go through 'security', with their 'passports', teddies and backpacks. An emergency diversion also takes place to add realism. Pupils then arrive at their destinations – classrooms decorated to represent the chosen countries. Parents come in to school and cook, and live links are set up with other countries, for example New Zealand. As a result of this and other work, pupils have a good sense and understanding of other cultures.

High expectations and aspirations are at the heart of your work and are echoed by the school's governors. You regularly check on the quality of teaching in the school and have recognised some outstanding practice. You have also supported individual colleagues to improve their practice when the need is identified. This has helped to establish a team which is eager to learn in a supportive environment. You have made a good start on implementing the school's new assessment system. However, you recognise that the system is not always used securely throughout the school to identify any underachievement. You have worked with other schools to ensure that teachers are making secure judgements about pupils' learning and have a clear understanding of what is expected in the new curriculum.

Safeguarding is effective.

Your systems for checking on all aspects of safeguarding are robust and thorough. Pupils say that they feel safe and if they have any worries they know who to go to for help. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers agree that the school keeps pupils safe and secure. You have provided regular training to ensure that staff understand how to identify and report concerns effectively. The school's records indicate that any issues are followed up promptly and extensively, communicating

with parents in a variety of ways that suit the individual needs of families. Any absence is followed up quickly. Leaders and governors have been very clear with parents and pupils about the importance of being in school regularly and on time. The result has been an increase in pupil attendance with very little lateness.

Inspection findings

- The new and developing assessment system has enabled you to identify a group of pupils in each class whose progress needs to be faster. Teachers focus their attention well on these pupils to accelerate their learning. For example, boys in the early years did not achieve as well in reading and number in the Reception classes in 2015 and this information has been shared with teachers in Year 1 so that learning is planned accordingly. The deputy headteacher is keeping a close eye to ensure that teachers across the school are planning learning which directly relates to regular, rigorous and ongoing assessment.
- The proportion of pupils who are making more than the expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics is increasing. Good progress for the most-able pupils is not yet as evident in all classes, particularly in writing and mathematics.
- Children in the early years achieve well in this organised environment where teachers plan activities that meet the needs of the children. From the beginning of the school's relationship with parents, staff plan opportunities for parents to work with the school to support their children's learning. Parents view this very positively, one commenting that 'my son has just started in Reception and his progress and ease of settling in has been fantastic'. At the end of the Reception year in 2015, the proportion of children gaining a good level of development increased to above the national average. The teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters represent) has improved through targeted support and professional development. As a consequence, results improved considerably in 2015 to above the national average. Pupils use their phonics skills well in their reading. Work seen during the inspection showed pupils' growing confidence in using these skills in writing, throughout all classes.
- Pupils take part in many activities to extend their knowledge of how others live. Pupils, parents and staff greatly enjoy the experiences that the school now provides. Pupils experience a range of activities throughout the year in religious education, cooking and in the school's well-developed spiritual, moral, social and cultural curriculum. As one pupil said, 'we are all different but treated the same'.
- Staff inspire pupils with their energetic and enthusiastic approach. Their work shows that teachers have planned a range of interesting learning opportunities for all pupils. As a result of this, pupils say that they enjoy learning in this 'exciting, amazing and awesome' school. They say that work is sometimes too easy, particularly in mathematics, and they would like it to be more challenging. Your recent checks have made you aware of this and of the inconsistencies in the feedback teachers give to pupils to help them to improve their work. You are currently working to improve these areas.

- You have identified accurately key priorities for the school and are taking action to tackle them. For example, you are aware that middle and senior leaders do not have sufficient time to carry out their roles effectively. You are particularly adept at identifying staff's strengths and nurturing these to the benefit of all. For example, you have supported and guided less experienced leaders to whom you have delegated various responsibilities, so that they are now in a stronger position to drive whole-school improvement.
- You have established good links with Sawtry Junior School to secure effective and smooth transition for pupils. From the outset, pupils in Year 2 take part in well-organised activities with pupils in Years 3 and 4. This contact helps to prepare pupils for the next stage in their education and ensures that learning continues to meet the needs of all pupils. Parents are very supportive of the joint playtimes, sports events and learning opportunities that take place.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- teachers in all classes provide more challenging activities for the most-able pupils so they make as much progress as they can in writing and mathematics
- teachers routinely identify next steps in pupils' learning in mathematics so that more pupils in all classes make better than the expected progress
- the school's new assessment system is securely used throughout the school so that the information more rapidly identifies gaps and underachievement so that they can be quickly rectified
- middle and senior leaders are given the time they need to carry out their new roles and responsibilities effectively.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ruth Brock
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I met with you and other senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and three other governors. I also spoke with a representative from the local authority. I visited a number of classes to observe teaching and look at pupils' work. I met with a group of pupils and spoke with many others during

lessons and breaktimes. We looked together at recent information about pupils' progress, which I evaluated. I looked at pupils' work in books. I reviewed records about keeping pupils safe and about attendance. I also examined a wide range of other documents, including those relating to the school's self-evaluation, development plans and your own checks on the school's work. Views of 71 parents from Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were considered, as were the views of 10 staff that completed Ofsted's questionnaire.