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22 January 2016

Mr Keith Williams  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Williams

### **Short inspection of Woodlands Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 12 January 2016, 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 Woodlands Primary was judged to be good in April 2011.

Since the previous inspection, you have been appointed as headteacher. A new deputy headteacher has also taken up post.

### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Woodlands Primary has not stood still, despite considerable changes to the senior leadership team in recent years. You have taken on the mantle of headship seamlessly from your predecessor. Consequently, pupils' outcomes and the quality of teaching have continued to improve.

You have won the respect of teachers and pupils because you seek their views, listen to their thoughts and act on their ideas. Pupils relish their many roles and take their responsibilities as school councillors, 'bully busters' and play leaders very seriously. They value the trust you place in them. They are excited about the difference they are making to school life. This is also true for staff. They are following your lead without fault. Everyone has bought into your plans for the future. Expectations are high, and all share a common desire to help pupils get the most out of their primary school experience.

A number of strengths were identified in the previous inspection. None of these has slipped in the intervening years. Pupils continue to behave well in lessons and around school, showing respect and courtesy to staff and visitors. Pupils benefit from strong teaching day in and day out, which is helping them to make better than expected progress. Standards at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 are above average year after year. Pupils consistently outstrip their peers in other schools in reading, writing and mathematics. Attendance is high for all groups of pupils. You are setting pupils up well for future academic success.

The shortcomings identified by inspectors have been tackled swiftly and with proven success. Pupils' gains in writing no longer lag behind those in other subjects. In fact, writing is becoming a notable strength within school. Teachers equip pupils with the basic skills to succeed, so pupils use grammar, spelling and punctuation well in their work. Their fluent handwriting style and good knowledge of vocabulary mean their work is neat, legible and peppered with interesting words and phrases which appeal to a reader. Teachers are skilled in helping pupils to understand the writing process. Teachers are creative and highly effective in capturing pupils' interests through exciting topics so that boys as well as girls are keen to put pen to paper. As a result, the gap in attainment between boys and girls is closing quickly over time. Your own information and the work in pupils' books show that younger girls are catching up with boys in mathematics by the time they leave Year 2.

The 'Woodlands 5' initiative has been instrumental in helping pupils to take greater ownership of their learning. By following this code, pupils are becoming resilient and curious learners, who can work by themselves to solve problems. You are developing this further, using the outdoor facilities on your doorstep, to extend pupils' learning experiences. This is bearing fruit, particularly for the most-able pupils. The number of pupils working beyond the levels expected for their age is above average across the board.

The parents I spoke with at the start of the school day had only positive comments to make about the school. One parent pointed to the school's success in nurturing pupils so that everyone could bloom. The responses to Parent View and the free-text comments made by some parents mostly confirm these findings. Almost all parents would recommend the school to others.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

You and the governing body ensure that staff are kept up to date with safeguarding requirements. Staff know their duties and understand their role in keeping pupils safe. They are well equipped to spot any signs that pupils may be at risk of harm and your records show that they are not afraid to report their concerns. Topics included in training have gone beyond neglect and abuse. An annual session led by local authority officers on equalities means that teachers are alert to different types of bullying. They can tune into, and tackle, hurtful language, such as homophobic, transphobic or racist name-calling. All required checks take place to make sure the adults that pupils meet in school do not pose any threat. You identify any risks to pupils' health and safety on the school site and during school visits and put appropriate mitigating action into place.

The pupils I spoke to and those who completed the online survey all said that they feel safe at school. They consider bullying and hurtful name-calling to be rare events and they are confident that any member of staff, not just their teachers, will listen to them if they have concerns. Parents' views are equally positive. An overwhelming majority agree that pupils are safe and well cared for at Woodlands. Helping pupils to keep themselves safe is woven through the learning programmes and strengthened by a range of visitors to school. For example, your work with national charities means that older pupils find out how to keep themselves safe from unwanted adult attention.

### **Inspection findings**

- You, the governors and the staff know the school very well. My visit did not uncover anything new about teaching or pupils' outcomes. Action is already under way to tackle any relative weaknesses. Your carefully crafted action plan is an effective vehicle for leading the school towards further success. Your track record in bringing about improvement speaks for itself. As soon as a shortcoming is spotted, appropriate action is unleashed. For example, last year, you picked up that too many pupils had weaknesses in their spelling skills. A new spelling strategy, underpinned by staff training, has led to a marked improvement. The 2015 test results for grammar, spelling and punctuation show that pupils did very well in this area of learning. Capacity to bring about further improvement is strong.
- Checks on teaching are frequent and result in clear and accurate advice to help teachers improve. Teachers are supported effectively in their quest to become the best. They work well together to share good practice within school. They make the most of the ample opportunities provided through external training.
- Members of the governing body have a good understanding of the school's performance and how this compares with that of other schools in the country. Governors use data well to ask challenging questions about any areas of underperformance. They know exactly which groups of pupils need additional support to excel. They keep abreast of their statutory duties, but there is scope for greater rigour in ensuring that nothing is missed. For example, they are not keeping a close enough check on the school's website to make sure it provides all of the information it should.

- Leaders across the school are playing their part. They are having an influence in all classrooms because they understand their role and you give them time to carry out their responsibilities. New leaders are being brought into the fold quickly. The close support they receive from you and a local authority officer means that they are gaining the skills and confidence to check on teaching and support their teacher colleagues.
- Effective teaching is commonplace at Woodlands. Warm relationships underpin pupils' positive attitudes to learning and willingness to do their best. Teachers expect a lot; they set the bar high and help pupils to soar. This is reflected in teachers' careful marking, purposeful classroom environments and pupils' well-presented books.
- Typically, around seven out of every 10 children who enter Reception have the skills and knowledge to make the most of their learning. A few lag behind. Their time in the early years serves them well for the next stage of their learning. Children behave well, listen attentively, ask questions and solve problems. They gain the foundation to become successful readers, writers and mathematicians. The proportion of children who gain a good level of development by the time they leave Reception is above average. The early years leaders took swift action to tackle the uncharacteristic dip in standards during 2014. Children make a good start in the early years. However, some of the activities they take part in do not offer enough challenge to help more children, particularly boys, exceed the standards expected for their age.
- Pupils' outcomes are a success story. They are consistently above average in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2 and Year 6. Pupils' gains in reading are particularly strong. Pupils know the sounds that letters make and they are eager readers because classrooms are alive with rich and varied texts. Pupils typically make strong progress in mathematics. Nonetheless, their books show too few opportunities for pupils to put their good mathematical skills to greater use by solving problems that involve logic and reasoning.
- Different groups of pupils are ready for the next stage of their education by the time they leave Woodlands. Disadvantaged pupils make the same progress as their classmates but they do not always gain the same high standards as their peers in class or in other schools. Too few exceed the expectations for their age.
- Pupils emerge from school as well-rounded youngsters who enjoy learning and get on with others because they respect and tolerate differences between individuals. They are willing fundraisers because you encourage them to put themselves into other people's shoes. For example, the recent visit to a food bank helped them understand the challenges some people in their community are facing. Activities such as these plus your rich curriculum mean pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong and they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils have greater opportunities to apply their mathematical learning to solve problems that test their reasoning and logic skills
- disadvantaged pupils make greater gains in their learning so they can reach the same standards as their peers in school and across the country
- Reception children, particularly boys, are able to make greater gains in their learning through activities that offer greater stretch and challenge
- there is greater rigour in the procedures governors use to check they are fulfilling their statutory responsibilities.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and a group of six middle leaders. I held discussions with four governors, a representative from the local authority and a group of older boys and girls. I also spoke to a number of pupils of different ages during playtime. We visited every classroom to talk to pupils, observe them at work and to look at their books. I chatted to a small number of parents and grandparents at the start of the school day. I took account of the 65 responses on Parent View, including the 35 free-text responses. I considered 15 responses from the staff online questionnaire. I also evaluated the 34 online responses completed by pupils.

I considered a range of school information, including your checks on teaching, your self-evaluation and your current action plan. We discussed your assessments of pupils' progress across the school. I evaluated safeguarding procedures, including your policies to keep children safe, staff training, safeguarding checks on adults who work and visit the school, and the records you keep of any concerns raised about pupils' safety.