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Mr Jeremy Jackson
Principal
Webster Primary School
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Dear Mr Jackson

Short inspection of Webster Primary School

Following my visit to your academy on 19 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in March 2011.

There has been considerable change since the previous inspection. Webster Primary converted to academy status in April 2013. Far more pupils attend the school than in the past and the numbers are set to rise further in the near future. This has resulted in the appointment of additional staff, substantial building work and refurbishment of the school site. You now offer specialised resource provision for pupils with autism, and speech and language difficulties. The leadership team has also been restructured. Two members of your leadership team have taken on the role of heads of school.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the academy since the last inspection. The considerable changes at Webster have made many calls on your time and energy, but you have not allowed these to get in the way of your core business. You have stood firm, set your sights high and kept pupils' achievement and enjoyment of school at the heart of everything you do. Consequently, teaching continues to improve and pupils thrive.

Webster is stronger than at the last inspection because of your insightful leadership and the support you receive from a united team of leaders, staff and governors. You are not afraid to bring about change when it is needed, despite the cost and effort of retraining staff or purchasing resources. You do not hang on to old ways of working when it becomes apparent these strategies are no longer reaping rewards. Difficult decisions are met head-on because you champion the needs and interests of the pupils in your care.

When the inspectors visited Webster in 2011, they found a number of notable strengths within the school. None of these have diminished over the years. Pupils behave well in lessons and around school. They are well supported to grow academically, socially and emotionally and they continue to enjoy all that school has to offer. This is reflected in the above-average attendance rates for all groups of pupils. Respect and tolerance are the cornerstone of your academy, leading to harmonious relationships. It was a joy to observe pupils from different faiths and cultures and with different learning needs working and playing together without any hint of bias or prejudice. New arrivals to the academy make a seamless transition and quickly become part of the Webster 'family'. Everyone is valued at your happy and welcoming school.

In 2011, inspectors judged standards to be low. This is no longer true. Pupils' achievement by the end of Year 6 is strengthening each year in reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, pupils have a firm foundation on which to secure future success.

Webster is a complex school in many respects because of the high number of pupils who leave and join throughout the year. Many new arrivals come from different countries and typically have little grasp of the English language when they join the academy. This is particularly the case in Key Stage 1. Almost half of the pupils in Year 2 did not begin their schooling at Webster. While such pupils settle well and make great strides in their learning, they do not always have enough time to make up for lost ground in the past. This is the main reason why standards at the end of Year 2 do not match those at the end of Year 6. In contrast, those pupils who start in the Nursery and stay the course reach the same standards as their peers nationally.

Inspectors asked you to improve pupils' writing. You have clearly tackled this well. Standards in writing by the end of Year 6 have increased each year. They were above average in 2015 because all pupils made strong progress from their lower than average starting points. Pupils' books show that this is not a one-off. Older pupils are developing as creative and accomplished writers. They have gained the skills and resilience to edit and redraft their work to make it even better. Although pupils in Years 1 and 2 make good progress in their writing, there is scope for further improvement, with more opportunities to practise their skills in writing at length.

The academy's new approach to teaching writing is clearly working. Teachers are very skilled in using interesting texts to shape pupils' writing activities. Their careful marking helps pupils to see what they need to do to improve their work.

The parents I met on the playground are full of praise for your work to keep their children safe and promote their enjoyment of learning. Parents' comments on Ofsted's 'Parent View' website confirm these positive views.

Safeguarding is effective.

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

Safeguarding pupils is a top priority. The governing body has invested heavily in developing a team of staff with the training, expertise and authority to act as safeguarding leads. The members of this team take their safeguarding responsibilities very seriously. They ensure academy policy and practice meet the latest government guidance for keeping pupils safe. They make sure staff, including those who have just joined the academy, receive up-to-date guidance and training so they are well equipped to spot and report concerns. Other adults, including sports coaches and visiting experts who work with pupils, complete the same training packages. As a result, safeguarding is everyone's business at Webster Primary.

Adults are confident to report any concerns which could indicate pupils are at risk. The highly detailed record-keeping is very effective at tracking this information to pinpoint patterns or more serious concerns. Referrals to social care services are timely and followed up rigorously. The overall safeguarding lead uses the long-established links with a wide range of external services to help resolve any difficulties that families or pupils may be facing. All the necessary checks to vet adults who work with pupils are completed in full.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and free from harmful name-calling and bullying. They are confident that any adult will listen to their concerns and take action to resolve problems. One pupil summed up the views of many very nicely in stating that 'every adult is here to help'. You are also helping pupils to make the right decisions to keep themselves safe. Pupils know the potential dangers associated with the internet and mobile phones and how to mitigate risk. Your sensitive work with older pupils is making sure they know how to avoid peer pressure to do something they know is wrong.

Inspection findings

- Your views of the academy are spot on. None of my inspection findings during the day came as a surprise to you, the governors or the staff. In fact, work is already under way to tackle any shortcomings. This is because you keep a close eye on teaching and pupils' achievement. You are well supported in this work by senior and middle leaders. The responsibility for driving improvement is shared evenly.
- Teachers' skills are constantly refreshed and refined through a wide range of training opportunities. Staff have been supported well in adapting to the new approaches for teaching English and phonics (the sounds that letters make). You make good use of the expertise within classes and beyond the academy to share good practice. A carefully structured programme is helping those teachers who are new to the teaching profession to make an excellent start to their careers.
- You are ably supported in your drive for improvement by members of the governing body. They have helped to shoulder the considerable burdens brought about by recent change. Governors ensure financial resources are targeted to support pupils' achievement through the appointment of skilled teachers and teaching assistants. They offer well-informed challenge because they visit the academy frequently and have a good grasp of data. Governors have an accurate understanding of the academy.

- Teachers abide by whole-school policies and agreed techniques for teaching. All have enthusiastically embraced the new strategies for teaching English. They follow the guidance for marking pupils' work to the letter. Teachers are highly effective in fostering a love of learning through purposeful and interesting activities. The warm relationships they establish go a long way in nurturing pupils' positive attitudes towards school. Pupils speak highly of their teachers. As one pupil commented, 'we learn so much and we can follow our dreams'.
- Teachers promote pupils' speaking and listening skills very well. They give everyone a voice and a chance to share their thoughts and ideas. Classrooms are full of effective prompts to support pupils' learning. Teachers do their very best to encourage pupils to read for pleasure through the broad selection of quality texts they share. However, teachers are not always exploiting the rich potential to develop pupils' writing skills across a range of subjects, particularly in Key Stage 1.
- All groups of pupils achieve well. Pupils from different minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language make strong progress. Pupils who attend the resource-base provision flourish academically and socially. There are no marked differences between groups by the time pupils leave Year 6. Disadvantaged pupils thrive. The progress they make exceeds other pupils nationally. They achieve higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics than their peers in school and across the country.
- Around two out of every three children who enter the Nursery need extra help with activities they would typically be expected to do at their age. The time children spend in the early years serves them well in many ways. They behave very well, listen attentively, follow instructions and form positive relationships with their classmates. They make good progress in many areas of learning, most notably speaking, listening and their personal and social development. Nonetheless, the proportion of children gaining a good level of development by the end of Reception is below average. This is due to weaknesses in children's reading and writing skills. Consequently, around half are not ready for the demands of Year 1. In particular, boys make slower progress and are on catch-up from the start.
- The teaching of phonics had been a weakness in the past. However, well-trained adults are now using the new teaching approaches very effectively to ensure pupils grasp the sounds that letters make. This is bearing fruit. Even the youngest children confidently have a go at writing using the sounds they know to spell new and common words. Many more children and pupils have the phonics skills usually seen at their age.
- The improvement in pupils' outcomes is clearly a cause for celebration. It shows that you and everyone in the academy have the skills and expertise to strengthen the academy further.
- Your rich curriculum, including the ample opportunities for art and music, gives everyone a chance to excel. Your work on different faiths gives pupils a wide perspective on diversity in the community and beyond. Your official partnership with a national museum enables older children to find out about the impact of hatred towards different groups on the basis of colour, culture or religion. You meet any racial intolerance head-on. Pupils leave your academy well prepared to succeed as learners but also as valuable citizens in modern Britain.

Next steps for the academy

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the focus on reading and writing in the early years is strengthened further so that more children, particularly boys, are ready to meet the demands of Year 1
- the new strategies for teaching writing are extended to ensure greater opportunities for pupils in Years 1 and 2 to write at length and to practise their writing skills across other subjects.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Manchester City 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 heads of school and the leader for early years. I held discussions with two governors, your external school improvement partner and a group of older boys and girls. I also spoke to a number of pupils of different ages during playtime. We visited classrooms to talk to pupils, observe them at work and to look at their books. We also watched a number of phonics sessions led by different adults. I chatted to a small number of parents at the start of the school day. I took account of the five free-text responses on Parent View plus the five responses from the staff online questionnaire.

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