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Mr P Sainsbury  
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21 April 2016

Dear Mr Sainsbury

### **Short inspection of Birdwell Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 17 March 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 the school was judged to be good in November 2011.

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

You have overseen a period of considerable change since the previous inspection. A rapid rise in pupil numbers has seen a near doubling of the school roll, requiring extensive rebuilding, changes in staffing and variations in class arrangements. Your vision, shared equally by staff and governors, of a journey to excellence has set the path for the school throughout this period. Far from standing still, the school has developed in several areas and ensured pupils' outcomes across the school are rising, particularly as they finish their primary education in Year 6.

You have successfully developed a close and cohesive leadership team around you. Leaders at all levels make a strong contribution to monitoring and evaluating the work of the school both formally and informally. The drive to improve is not just the result of leaders at all levels regularly observing lessons, looking at pupils' work in books and tracking pupils' progress, but also lies in the many daily conversations and discussions that occur around the school. One of the school's many strengths is the way that staff work well in a close and supportive team approach to share ideas and to plan together engaging and interesting lessons. Staff have raised their expectations of what pupils can achieve to higher levels. The fact that teachers are providing greater challenge is evident in the rising standards seen across the school. The proportion of Year 6 pupils reaching higher standards in mathematics and reading last year was significantly above average and better than at any time previously.

You have continued to oversee developments in the curriculum that help to engage and motivate pupils, and overall attendance is rising as a result. The school grounds have been adapted successfully to provide well-used outdoor learning environments and sports facilities. School corridors and classrooms display lively and interesting examples of pupils' work across different curriculum areas. The school's teaching of a modern foreign language is reflected in the many signs, labels and instructions written in Spanish around all areas of the school.

Pupils show a consistently positive attitude to learning; they cooperate well in a friendly and sociable manner. Relationships are strong across the school, with pupils responding respectfully to teachers' questions and guidance. Parents appreciate how the school is developing their children's knowledge and achievement across a broad range of subjects. At the same time, parents recognise the part the school plays in developing pupils' social and personal skills. One parent commented that staff are dedicated to providing 'a warm, safe and happy environment and are very committed to the pupils' well-being and welfare', a comment that is typical of many parents' views.

Your approach to developing the quality of teaching works well. Regular monitoring by a range of senior and middle leaders accurately identifies areas for development. Staff training and coaching develop the skills and subject knowledge of new staff and quickly secure good learning and outcomes for pupils. You have responded positively to the recommendation from the previous inspection and provide more opportunities for staff to share the features of high-quality teaching. However, you recognise that there is still more to be done to share the stronger practice in Reception classes, particularly to help develop a consistent approach and improve Year 1 pupils' understanding of letters and the sounds they make.

Leaders and governors recognise that while standards are rising, pupils' progress in writing has lagged behind that of other subjects, and in particular, the progress made by boys. In response, the leadership team has implemented a range of strategies that are beginning to address these weaknesses. From looking at pupils' books, it is clear that the new initiatives are helping many to improve the structure and quality of their writing.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

- Staff at the school provide high levels of professional care and ensure that pupils feel safe and secure. A collective school culture places a strong emphasis on maintaining robust safeguarding arrangements. Records are well ordered and show plenty of evidence of staff working together with other agencies and services to ensure the safety of those in their care.
- All of the safeguarding records, documentation and procedures are fit for purpose and successfully implemented. Staff are appropriately trained and understand how to spot concerns, and to record and share these through the school's referral processes.

- The school is keen to encourage pupils to help shape the school through collecting their views and opinions. Pupils welcome the introduction of the 'post box' and appreciate how staff listen to their concerns and work to resolve any issues.

## **Inspection findings**

- You are working at many different levels to address pupils' comparatively weaker progress in writing. Staff gather examples of pupils' written work to collect detailed information of what pupils are able to do and also to identify the next steps to develop pupils' writing. Teachers describe how this process makes them more accountable for ensuring that pupils are ready to move to the next year group with specific writing skills in place.
- You have introduced opportunities for pupils to develop richer vocabulary and to rehearse their writing ideas through discussions and debates. When I was speaking to boys in your school, they reported that being able to give voice to their ideas is improving their ability and confidence to set their ideas down in writing. From looking at a range of pupils' books, it is clear that the initiatives are helping many to improve the quality and quantity of their writing. Progress is particularly rapid in Years 5 and 6. For example, Year 5 pupils have made rapid progress from the start of the year to the point where they are using subordinate clauses and writing complex sentences with confidence.
- In the Reception classes, early reading activities are closely matched to children's needs. Teachers quickly build children's skills and develop their ability to sound out letters and blend them into words. Staff in Year 1 classes do not use their assessments as effectively to identify pupils who are finding learning specific letters and sounds a little difficult to master. Year 1 staff also use a slightly different approach to teaching the articulation of letters and blending of sounds that serves to confuse some pupils.
- You have overseen an increase in pupils' overall attendance over the last few years. A proportion of pupils, particularly those pupils eligible for pupil premium funding, were too often regularly missing school. The leadership team has acted effectively and reduced persistent absence since the start of the year. An engaging curriculum that develops pupils' skills and knowledge across many subjects makes the majority of pupils reluctant to miss time at school. In addition, the provision of well-attended breakfast and after-school clubs encourages pupils, including those eligible for pupil premium funding, to attend. However, there is limited evaluation of the effectiveness of the school's use of pupil premium funding in relation to its impact on reducing persistent absence.
- Leaders continue to improve the school's curriculum. Opportunities abound to develop pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding across subjects and to develop a mature and reasoned outlook. Pupils' participation in sport has increased dramatically, particularly for girls in the school. Pupils enthusiastically describe how the improvements to the school grounds are providing increased opportunities for them to learn outdoors under canvas and amidst wooden structures. These experiences are some of the pupils' favourite features of the school.

- The proportion of pupils reaching expected standards in reading, writing, grammar and punctuation at the end of Year 6 is above average. Every single Year 6 pupil who left the school last year gained a Level 4 in mathematics. The proportion of pupils going on to reach higher standards in mathematics and reading is significantly above average. Of particular note, three quarters of the girls in Year 6 last year reached higher standards in each of the different subjects of reading, mathematics and writing.
- Governors on the board bring a wide range of relevant skills and expertise, which has helped to support you to move the school on. They show a good understanding of the school and have provided strong strategic direction that has helped to maintain the unique qualities of the school. Their monitoring of the school's performance is rigorous and tightly focused on the key priorities. They are rightly proud of the part they have played in ensuring that the school is an inclusive and welcoming environment.
- Middle leaders play a vital role in driving the school forward. Through a period of considerable change, they have developed their roles and responsibilities. Through their monitoring, coaching and subject knowledge, they help to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and provide the school with additional capacity to improve. They exude enthusiasm. Of the 34 questionnaires submitted during the inspection, all staff who responded agree that pupils are safe and well looked after and that the school has a culture that encourages calm and orderly conduct, and is aspirational for all pupils.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and the management committee should ensure that:

- the teaching of early reading skills is improved across the Reception and Year 1 classes by developing a consistent approach to teaching individual letters and sounds, developing effective use of assessment and through sharing good practice.
- in reviewing the effectiveness of their use of pupil premium funding, they evaluate its impact on reducing persistent absence.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Lindfield  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, senior and middle leaders, and members of the board of directors, including the chair of directors. I spoke with pupils throughout the inspection, including in lessons, at breaktime and during a lunchtime meeting. I scrutinised the quality of pupils' work in their books. I made a number of visits with you and senior leaders to a wide range of different classrooms and observed pupils during the teaching of letters and sounds. I also took account of 34 responses to the staff questionnaire and 75 responses by parents to the online questionnaire, Parent View. I looked at a wide range of evidence relating to safeguarding, the quality and accuracy of assessment information and the school's analysis of attendance records.