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Joanne Wilson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Wilson

### **Short inspection of Castlefort Junior Mixed and Infant School**

Following my visit to the school on 12 July 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 school was judged to be good in January 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 are an effective leader who has successfully created a school where pupils feel valued. 'We can have opinions' and 'we are respected', were just some of the comments from pupils while talking to me about their school. The school's mission, 'inspiring bright futures together' permeates all aspects of school life. You and the staff work together successfully to help pupils become individuals who have high hopes for the future.

Eight out of the 12 current class teachers have been appointed since the previous inspection. Against this background of significant changes in staffing, you have worked well with senior leaders to ensure that the overall quality of teaching remains good and that pupils make at least good progress by the time they leave the school.

The actions taken to raise the attainment of most-able pupils in mathematics by the end of Year 6 have had a beneficial impact on pupils. At the end of key stage 2, standards in mathematics have been significantly above the national average for the last four years. The provisional results for the current pupils in Year 6 indicate that the vast majority of pupils have met the expected standard in mathematics. Work in pupils' books and discussions with pupils confirm that most achieve consistently well in mathematics. Pupils told me that they particularly enjoy solving problems and explaining how they work out their answers. This was clearly evident during my

visits to lessons. Pupils responded enthusiastically towards challenging questions in mathematics. You have accurately identified that pupils' achievement in writing is not as strong as in mathematics. Your plans for improving pupils' writing are appropriate and include a greater focus on spelling, punctuation, grammar, and proofreading for errors.

The leader who oversees the achievement of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities makes sure that staff who provide these pupils with extra help have the necessary skills and knowledge. She also makes sure that pupils learn as much as possible during these extra sessions. This was an area identified as needing improvement at last inspection. School records confirm that these extra sessions help pupils to fill gaps in their learning. However, you and senior leaders rightly recognise that these sessions on their own are not enough; further work is required to help class teachers to better meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities in order to accelerate their progress further.

At the time of the previous inspection, it was recommended that teachers improve children's independent learning skills in the early years. In response to this, you introduced an accreditation system. Accredited pupils are known as 'little learners' in the early years, 'learning champions' in key stage 1 and 'learning ambassadors' in key stage 2. Teachers and teaching assistants use this system well to promote positive attitudes towards learning and to encourage pupils to be independent and use their initiative. Accredited pupils explained that they feel proud when they receive a certificate and are treated to a complimentary lunch.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The arrangements for keeping pupils safe are effective. Senior leaders, staff and the school's family support worker keep a watchful eye on pupils and take prompt action if they believe a pupil may be at risk. You and the school's family support worker leave no stone unturned when it comes to securing the necessary help for pupils from a range of external agencies. Issues and concerns, no matter how minor, are carefully documented so that nothing is overlooked. The governing body is equally vigilant in relation to safeguarding. Governors make sure that school policies in relation to keeping pupils safe are regularly updated. They also make sure that staff attend training regularly and that the school site is secure.

The parents I spoke with, all those who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire and the school's own questionnaire, stated that their children feel safe in the school. The pupils I spoke with told me that they feel safe because the adults in school listen to them. Pupils speak knowledgeably about keeping safe around school and at home. For instance, they explained the importance of keeping personal information secure when using the internet.

### **Inspection findings**

- You and other senior leaders have accurately evaluated the work of the school. Senior leaders know which aspects are strengths and also where further

improvements are required. The school improvement plan identifies suitable actions to continue raising pupils' achievement.

- Senior leaders, staff and governors place a strong emphasis on pupils' personal development. As a consequence, pupils behave well, learn to cooperate, treat others with respect and become confident individuals. Throughout the inspection, pupils were keen to talk to me about their school and share their experiences. 'Our school is like one big family', exclaimed a pupil with pride; a view held by many others.
- The governing body share senior leaders' aspirations for the school and the community. Different members of the governing body meet with staff and pupils, volunteer in classes and attend celebration assemblies. Through meetings and visits they use the information they gather to keep themselves up to date with the work of the school. They ask leaders pertinent questions about the effectiveness of the school.
- Senior leaders and governors have worked together successfully to secure the funding required to extend the school's provision. Castle Tots opened in November 2015. It provides morning, afternoon or full-day sessions for two-year-olds. The adults in Castle Tots work closely with staff from the early years. Together they plan activities which help children to learn well through first-hand experiences.
- The large majority of children who are currently in the Reception Year are expected to achieve a good level of development. However, a closer analysis of this information shows a marked difference between boys and girls; a difference that was also evident last year. Almost all of the girls are expected to achieve a good level of development, compared to only half of the boys. You and the teacher with responsibility for early years accept the need to more frequently check how well different groups of children in the early years are learning and to respond more quickly in response to gaps in their attainment.
- Pupils of different ages enjoy reading and participating in reading activities. For instance, pupils read their favourite book and then used a box to recreate a scene from the book. One pupil, for instance, had carefully transformed a box into the mouth of a crocodile and placed different characters from the story 'The hungry crocodile' inside the mouth. A more structured approach to teaching phonics (letters and the sounds they make) and extra help for pupils with their reading has had a positive impact. The school's latest information shows that more pupils than previously have met the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check.
- Last year, school leaders correctly identified that pupils' achievement in writing was not as strong as in reading and mathematics. In all year groups staff make sure that pupils have regular opportunities to write. They also make sure that writing activities are interesting for pupils. Pupils in Year 6, for instance, were completely captivated as they wrote personal profiles. They chose their vocabulary carefully and used humour to good effect. Importantly, Year 6 pupils ensured that their sentences made sense, with correct spelling and accurate use of punctuation and grammar. This effective practice is not sufficiently widespread across the rest of the school. Work in pupils' books shows that lower-ability pupils and those of average ability repeatedly make basic errors when they write. As a consequence, pupils' achievement in writing continues to lag

behind reading and mathematics. Senior leaders are planning to provide further writing training for staff and opportunities for staff to share effective practice.

- When you and senior leaders meet with staff, you discuss the achievement of individual pupils and agree upon the actions that will be taken to help pupils achieve their learning targets. However, senior leaders recognise the need to ensure that class teachers consistently implement the agreed actions. This is particularly the case for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Your latest achievement information shows that although these pupils make good progress over time, rates of progress vary between classes and subjects and that sometimes these pupils do not make the progress they should.
- Senior leaders use additional funding for disadvantaged pupils to pay for extra teachers in Years 5 and 6. This enables pupils to be taught in small groups for English and mathematics. The teachers, and especially those in Year 6, carefully plan activities which successfully build on what pupils already know, understand and can do. Work in pupils' books and the school's latest achievement information shows that the oldest pupils in the school make rapid gains in their learning, with some disadvantaged pupils making more progress than their peers. The provisional national test results for the current pupils in Year 6 compare favourably with the national results for 2016.
- In the rest of the school, the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used to provide these pupils with extra support. The support that pupils receive enables them to meet the standards expected for their age. Your analysis shows that increasing proportions are also exceeding the standards expected for their age.
- All the parents who spoke with me and the vast majority who completed the Ofsted questionnaire were positive about the school. Very few who completed the questionnaire raised concerns in relation to different aspects of the school's work. The school uses a range of suitable methods to seek the views of and engage with parents, these include a weekly newsletter, assemblies, workshops, an annual questionnaire and the school website. You and your governors are aware that some parents do not participate in school events and you are considering ways in which you can further increase parental involvement.
- Pupils appreciate the wide range of visits organised by staff. They told me about their visit to London and learning about the Houses of Parliament, and their visit to Cadbury World and learning about the origins of chocolate. Visits such as these effectively broaden pupils' experiences and motivate pupils to learn. Pupils described their visits as 'fun', 'exciting' and 'educational'.
- Pupils enjoy keeping fit. Through clubs such as tag-rugby, netball and football, pupils develop a range of skills and improve their fitness levels. Pupils like to participate in the annual school mini-marathon. The younger pupils run in circuits around the playground, while the older pupils take part in a marshalled run in the local area.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- staff in the early years ensure that a higher proportion of boys reach a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year
- teachers continue to raise pupils' achievement in writing by making sure that pupils, and especially those of lower and average ability, spell correctly and use punctuation and grammar accurately
- teachers consistently implement the actions required to help different groups of pupils, and especially those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, achieve consistently well across different classes and subjects.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for Walsall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Usha Devi  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection I met with you, other senior leaders, the school's family support worker, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body and three other governors. I spoke with pupils throughout the school day. You and other senior leaders joined me on brief visits to all classes. We observed pupils and looked at examples of pupils' work from a range of subjects. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's own evaluation of its performance, documents related to keeping pupils safe, the most recent information about pupils' achievement and the school's analysis of its own parental questionnaire. I took account of eight responses to the Ofsted pupil questionnaire and six responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire. I spoke informally with parents at the start of the school day and reviewed the 11 responses to the online questionnaire, including the free-text comments.