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Mr Graeme Wright
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Dear Mr Wright

Short inspection of The Sibsey Free Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 September 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.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Outcomes at the end of Year 6 for English and mathematics have been above the national average for the last three years. Although you have only been in post as headteacher from the beginning of September 2016, you have quickly and accurately understood the school's strengths and areas for improvement. You have promptly put in place an appropriate action plan to ensure that your high standards and ambition for the school are met. Staff and governors share your aspiration to increase pupils' progress. Your enthusiasm for the future is infectious.

Leaders have sustained the significant strengths noted at the previous inspection, particularly the high quality of care, guidance and support which they give to pupils. These qualities are the foundation of the school's culture, ethos and values and are best evidenced through the voice of pupils.

Pupils told me that they are proud to be at the school. They said that the best thing about the school was the teachers, who are all approachable and trustworthy. They explained that the school helps them to be independent and this has prepared them well for their futures. Pupils are confident and articulate. You have developed in them a strong understanding of equality. They said that racism and homophobia were not acceptable because 'difference is good'. You have ensured that they have a clear understanding of British values. Pupils appreciate the many opportunities

you have created for them to practise democracy and to vote at school. They told me how much they enjoy debating and spoke with particular enthusiasm about a recent debate on deforestation.

Parents who spoke with me were universal in their praise of leaders' support for pupils' well-being. They told me how the school had 'gone above and beyond' to provide additional help to pupils, when they had to deal with anxieties, illness, or family bereavement. Parents said that this additional support had helped both their children and themselves to get through difficult times. One parent, for example, described pupils at the school as being 'happy, well looked after and supported'.

You have, rightly, focused on improving early years and Year 1 pupils' understanding of phonics. Pupils decode unfamiliar words confidently because the school's teaching of phonics is effective. For the last three years, pupils have achieved above the national standard in the phonics test at the end of Year 1. In 2016, all pupils passed the phonics screening test.

Leaders have ensured that the school's high standards for monitoring pupils' attainment and progress have been maintained since the last inspection. You have adapted your assessment system to reflect recent changes to the curriculum and national performance measures. You have continued your close working partnerships with other schools, praised at the last inspection, to support you in this work. This has involved you working together with local schools to ensure that your assessments are accurate.

You have a clear understanding of how well different groups of pupils are doing. You have identified that you want to ensure that more pupils reach the higher standards at the end of key stage 2. You have plans in place to help more girls reach higher levels in mathematics and for more boys to reach higher levels in writing. While it is too early to judge the impact of these actions, they are the appropriate priorities for the school.

At the previous inspection, the lead inspector asked leaders to increase the proportion of pupils attaining at the higher levels in English and particularly in writing. For the last few years, the proportions of pupils who made and exceeded expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics were close to, or above, national figures by the end of key stage 2. The pupils make most progress in writing during key stage 2. Before that, in key stage 1, their progress in writing is less than it is in mathematics and reading. One of your priorities is to put into place additional support earlier for the most able pupils, so that more pupils reach the higher standard by the end of their time at the school.

Although attendance has been above national standards overall for the past three years, persistent absence rose in 2015, specifically for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You acknowledge that, currently, the level of persistent absence among these pupils continues to be too high. You have already identified plans to use government funding this year to improve pupils' attendance. Your plans include support with transport and liaising

directly with hospitals for pupils with medical needs to try and arrange appointments out of school hours. The pupils with whom I spoke clearly understood the importance of good attendance. They told me that the weekly award for best class attendance, which you have introduced, has been a good motivator to encourage all pupils to be in school every day.

Safeguarding is effective.

You are the designated safeguarding leader and you are supported well by a strong safeguarding team. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are robust and that pupils' safety is paramount. Records are detailed and of high quality.

Staff understand and act promptly to report any concerns. The governing body has ensured that all staff have had up-to-date training. You have been prompt in ensuring that the very latest government guidance has been passed on to staff. Staff are alert to potential early warning signs.

Parents work closely with the school, and in addition use the parent committee to communicate any local knowledge which might affect pupils' safety. You work well with external agencies to make sure that pupils and their parents receive any additional support that they need. Where external agencies cannot provide this support, you have found ways for the school to provide it. You talked me through an example of how you were vigilant and successfully followed up a child who was potentially missing from education.

The pupils with whom I spoke all said that they feel safe at school. They speak confidently about being able to approach any member of staff if they have concerns. Pupils know what to do to protect themselves on the internet and on mobile phones. You have ensured that pupils are aware of how to keep themselves safe from strangers and on the roads. You worked recently with the highways department to get a 'puffin crossing' put in front of the school. Pupils spoke with enthusiasm about a range of traffic awareness events, which you have organised. They particularly remembered an assembly about lorry stopping distances and pupils now work as junior road safety officers. Year 6 pupils were looking forward to a planned trip into Boston to learn about how to keep safe in more built-up places.

Pupils said that bullying is very rare and were adamant that, if it did happen, it would be dealt with quickly and effectively by teachers. Your internal bullying logs corroborate this. You are aware that a minority of parents remain concerned about bullying and have planned a suitable series of events to reassure them about the effectiveness of the school's work.

Inspection findings

- You have evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the school accurately. The school improvement plan involves rigorous monitoring and evaluation. You acknowledge the areas for further development in

relation to the most able pupils and persistent absence of some pupils.

- The governing body provides you with appropriate support and challenge. It meets in advance of the full governing body meeting to scrutinise the documentation which you provide for the members. This means that the members can then ask you informed and specific questions about pupils' progress.
- The governing body monitors the school's use of government funding well. It acknowledges that money for disadvantaged pupils can be targeted more at improving the attendance of these pupils.
- The governing body is vigilant in checking that the school's safeguarding arrangements are robust.
- Pupils read widely and often. You have successfully created a love of reading in pupils. All pupils with whom I spoke told me that they enjoy reading and read every day, both at home and at school. Pupils' reading journals are an effective way of combining work in school with reading at home, so that they make good progress.
- Pupils can name books of authors which they particularly enjoy. Leaders have created lively displays and posters around the school, which help to introduce pupils to a wider range of authors and books.
- In 2016, pupils achieved above national expectations in reading at key stage 2.
- On our tour of lessons, we saw teachers in key stage 1 using questions highly effectively to develop pupils' reading skills and understanding. Pupils responded well to this and showed an enthusiasm for learning. You agreed with me that the teachers did not question pupils deeply enough in key stage 2 to enable the most able pupils to make as much progress as they could.
- You continue to focus on improving pupils' writing skills. You have introduced more opportunities for pupils to write for appropriate audiences and purposes. For example, I saw pupils enjoying understanding the features of safety advertisements, before having a go at writing and filming their own versions.
- Leaders have worked with other local schools to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. You intend to continue this work because it has proven valuable in sharing best practice among the teachers at Sibsey and in making sure that your school's assessments are accurate.
- You have introduced a marking policy, which is used consistently across the school. Pupils' books show that this is helping them to understand when they make mistakes and, therefore, to learn from them. Pupils' books are presented to a very high standard. The pupils were proud to show their books to me and to talk about their work.
- Pupils with whom I spoke were mature, confident and polite. They enjoy contributing to the wider community and told me about a range of charity events in which they are involved.
- The school's website does not meet statutory requirements for published information on pupil premium and sports funding.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, reach the higher standard at the end of key stage 2 assessments
- there is a reduction in pupils' persistent absence, particularly of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the school's website meets statutory requirements for published information on pupil premium and sports funding.

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

Yours sincerely

Sally Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with parents at the start of the day, I met with you, senior leaders, governors, including the chair of the governing body and a governor with safeguarding responsibilities. I spoke on the telephone to a representative from the local authority. I listened to pupils read and spoke with a group of pupils about their school experience. You and I visited all classes and examined pupils' workbooks. In addition, I scrutinised the school's safeguarding arrangements and records, including the single central register. I evaluated the school's documentation in relation to pupils' performance, improvement planning, attendance, governing body meetings and monitoring records. I took account of 50 responses to Parent View, the 51 responses to the Ofsted free text service and 17 responses to the staff survey. There were no responses from pupils to Ofsted's online survey. This short inspection focused on:

- whether more pupils were attaining at the higher levels in writing
- whether younger pupils had a better understanding about the links between letter and word sounds
- if the school's work on assessing pupils' progress was still effective
- if rates of persistent absence were declining for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- if safeguarding was still effective across the school and pupils were safe.