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Mrs Jenny Garratt  
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Dear Mrs Garratt

### **Short inspection of Walsall Wood School**

Following my visit to the school on 3 November 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 May 2012.

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

You and your leadership team have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Your positive and enthusiastic leadership sets the tone for exciting teaching and productive learning. You have created a happy and caring school. Expectations of pupils and staff are high. You have appointed a highly committed and able staff team and together you strive for the very highest levels of achievement. Staff morale is high and pupils are proud to say they attend Walsall Wood. Parents speak highly of the school. As one parent put it: 'My child loves this school and has come on leaps and bounds since joining. A big thumbs up from me!'

You have successfully addressed the key issues raised at the previous inspection. Teachers regularly check on pupils during lessons to ensure that they understand the tasks set and are suitably challenged. Teachers' marking and feedback have improved and pupils are clear about how to improve their work. Standards in writing for middle-ability pupils are now above average. Impressively, the progress made by middle-ability disadvantaged pupils was in the top 10% nationally in Year 6 in 2016. Progress in the early years has also accelerated in all areas, including children's knowledge and understanding of the world. The large majority of children now reach a good level of development, so they are well prepared for Year 1.

There remains work to be done in raising achievement in reading in key stage 2 and improving outcomes in reading and mathematics for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities in some year groups. Together with governors and your leadership team, you have rightly identified these aspects and have formulated precise and detailed action plans to ensure that these become areas of strength within the school. It is, however, too early to judge the impact of these actions.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The safeguarding culture within the school is strong. As the designated safeguarding lead, you ensure that safeguarding is a collective responsibility. Prompts and reminders for staff are publicised throughout the school, including in staff cloakrooms. Staff are fully trained and very knowledgeable about the actions they need to take if they have a concern about a pupil. You are meticulous in your recording of these concerns. Incidents are well documented and referrals made where appropriate to outside agencies. Robust checks are carried out on staff prior to appointment to ensure that they are suitably qualified and fit to work with children. As a result, safeguarding procedures and practice are fit for purpose.

Pupils feel safe and have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. This is because pupil safety is, again, a collective responsibility. Pupils know that the site manager locks the gates and visitors are given badges when they enter the school. Pupils themselves carry out roles such as 'safety patrol officers' and 'A\* sheriffs'. They lead assemblies about staying safe, look after younger pupils and resolve minor disputes on the playground. They take these responsibilities seriously and have a strong sense of moral purpose in protecting one another. They have a good awareness of different dangers, including those associated with using the internet. They understand different forms of bullying, but gave a resounding 'no' when asked if bullying happened in school.

### **Inspection findings**

- As headteacher, you lead by example. You are approachable, efficient and knowledgeable about where strengths and weaknesses lie. Your self-evaluation of the school is honest and accurate. Together with your leadership team, you carry out regular checks on the quality of teaching and provide good support to those who are newly qualified. Teachers are keen to improve their practice and welcomed a recent opportunity to observe a colleague or watch videos of their own teaching in order to share good practice and focus more intently on how pupils learn. You work in close collaboration with other schools and have recently become a strategic partner with a teaching school to continue the professional development of all staff and to avoid working in isolation.

- You are ably supported by a dedicated, united and proactive leadership team. All members lead their subject areas effectively. Each member generates an action plan to pinpoint where areas of improvement are needed. The success of the actions taken is reviewed regularly and reports provided for governors. This ensures that leadership is a shared role. Together, you track the progress of all pupils and provide additional support, where needed, through group work, one-to-one teaching or a structured intervention programme.
- Governors are knowledgeable and effective. Between them, they have a good range of skills which they utilise well to support and challenge you and your leadership team. They have a good understanding of how well the school is doing compared with other schools nationally because you provide them with regular and clear assessment information. Governors are fully involved in setting the strategic direction for the school as shown by their recent debate about the issues and judgements relating to the school's self-evaluation document. They visit school to talk to pupils and also help with school trips. This provides them with valuable first-hand information and a clear perspective on life in school.
- Phonics is taught well from the outset. The most able children are identified quickly and taught letter formation and sounds from as early as the Nursery Year. This gets them off to a swift start with their early reading and writing skills. Other children are introduced to letters and sounds when teachers assess that they are ready. Pupils in Year 1 who read to me demonstrated strong levels of understanding of how to break down and blend tricky words. Consequently, attainment in the Year 1 phonics screening check is above average over time. However, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do less well than other pupils nationally in this check.
- The school provides lots of structured intervention programmes for pupils who are struggling, especially in reading. Many pupils, particularly in key stage 1, benefit from the one-to-one support provided and they make good gains in their learning. However, reading progress across key stage 2 is not consistent and pupils do not build strongly enough on their starting points. This is because reading materials are not diverse or challenging enough for older readers. For example, during quiet reading time, after lunch, almost all pupils read books from the reading scheme, which are quite short. This reduces their ability to read more complex texts, develop higher-order reading skills or extend the breadth of their reading, so slowing their progress.
- The most able pupils make good progress, particularly in writing, as they move through the school. Teachers set work at a suitably challenging level and, on occasions, provide teaching assistant time to ensure that pupils are supported. Since the previous inspection, increased numbers of pupils have reached the higher levels or are working at greater depth in writing. However, too few achieved well in reading in 2016.

- Pupils' writing is developing well and all ability groups make good progress across the school. Work in pupils' books shows that the majority of pupils write neatly and imaginatively. Good attention is paid to sentence structure and feedback from teachers indicates precisely where grammar, spelling and punctuation corrections are needed. Teachers also indicate where pupils' ideas can be expanded to help improve the content of a piece of work. Pupils demonstrate increasing confidence in drafting, editing and then finalising a piece of writing. A range of genres are covered during writing lessons and good links are often made to class reading texts, such as 'The ice palace'.
- Pupils make good progress in mathematics and are beginning to use more problem-solving and reasoning skills. Teachers plan imaginative activities and make links, where possible, to real-life experiences. For example, children in the Reception class were tasked with making a broomstick from twigs and then finding the most suitable equipment to measure it with. Items ranged from cubes and counters to rulers. Excellent mathematical language was used throughout the lesson so that children developed their language skills in conjunction with their mathematical skills.
- The majority of children join the early years with skills and knowledge which are below those typical for their age, especially in communication and language. Children make good progress because teaching and leadership are effective. Disadvantaged children are now making accelerated progress because leaders have taken action to begin intervention support at a much earlier stage in the year. As a result, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development has risen and was in line with the national average in 2016. Induction processes are well established and this ensures that children settle quickly in the Nursery and Reception classes. Regular observations are made by adults to determine children's level of ability and inform next steps. Accurate assessments and samples of children's work are compiled in well-organised and carefully presented learning journals.
- Outcomes at the end of key stage 1 are also rising and provisional information for 2016 shows that attainment was above average in reading, writing and mathematics. These pupils made good progress from their starting points and a higher proportion than average were working at greater depth. Since the previous inspection, pupils have made good progress in key stage 2. However, in 2016, outcomes in reading fell to below average. You have already analysed reasons for this and have reorganised how reading is taught and assessed in key stage 2. For example, all pupils have been assessed using a standardised test so that you have an accurate starting point. Early checks show that current pupils are making accelerated progress. Nevertheless, there remains more to be done to extend pupils' reading comprehension and development of higher-order skills, for example skimming, scanning and inference.

- The school's own information and work in pupils' books show that the progress rates of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are accelerating. Good use is made of the pupil premium funding and numerous intervention programmes are targeted well at those who need to catch up. As a result, differences in the attainment of these pupils and their peers are diminishing. While disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieved above their peers and above the national average in 2015, outcomes dipped in 2016. Provisional results show that these groups were below other pupils nationally in reading and mathematics.
- Pupils enjoy school and most attend regularly. Good tracking systems are in place and you have had considerable success in improving punctuality and reducing persistent absence. Parents are challenged on attendance concerns, including first-day calling and visits made by the education welfare officer employed by the school. While overall attendance is broadly average, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities was lower in the 2015/16 year than for other pupils.
- Pupils behave well and are courteous and polite. They enjoy school and say that they love physical education because the teacher makes it fun. Many learn to play instruments, free of charge, as this is funded by the school. Art is also strongly promoted together with computing skills. The curriculum is enriched through clubs and trips, and this adds to pupils' enjoyment of school. Pupils have a good understanding of other cultures and different religious beliefs. They know what democracy means in terms of British values, and are steadfast in their view that tolerance and respect must be applied at all times. You and your staff ensure that pupils are listened to and involved in decision-making.

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

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- pupils in key stage 2 are provided with increased levels of challenge and greater breadth of reading material to extend their reading skills
- outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities improve so that they are in line with other pupils nationally in reading and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Heather Simpson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

Lines of enquiry pursued during this inspection focused on:

- the quality of provision in the early years, especially for disadvantaged pupils
- achievement in reading in key stage 2
- attendance levels and rates of persistent absence
- the effectiveness of leadership, including governance
- the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures.

During the inspection, I met with you and members of your leadership team and governing body. I discussed the work of the school with you, including the processes and procedures in place for safeguarding. I visited all classrooms, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at the work in their books. I listened to pupils read and met with older pupils to gather their views about the school.

I looked at a range of school documents, including the school's information about pupils' achievement and attendance. I also reviewed the school's own evaluation of its work, together with the school development plan. I took account of the 21 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. The school's own survey of parents' views was also considered and additional information collected from parents at the end of the school day. There were no responses to the online pupil or staff questionnaire, but their views were considered during discussions.