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Mrs Ruth Wylie
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Dear Mrs Wylie

Short inspection of Wren's Nest Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 September 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school.

Since the previous inspection, the school has enjoyed some mixed fortunes. Between 2013 and 2015, progress measures were strong overall even though academic standards were below average. In 2016, a new set of national measures were introduced and this presented a much weaker picture, especially in reading. During this inspection, I gave careful consideration as to whether this could bring down the school's overall effectiveness judgement, should the school receive a full two-day inspection at this time. I decided not to convert this one-day visit to a full inspection because of several key factors. Namely: the strong leadership provided by you and your senior team, the current quality of teaching and learning, and the excellent attention to pupils' welfare, well-being and safety. I also noted that the most able pupils now do very well at Wren's Nest Primary, which was identified as an improvement area by the previous inspection.

Currently, you are focusing on improving standards in reading and writing and actions taken so far have proved successful. Even so, there is still more work to be done to develop pupils' comprehension skills so that they can make the most of school, both now and in the future.

Parents are very grateful for the school's work to support pupils and families. They express positive views about you and your team and report that their children enjoy school and are keen to attend. Inspection evidence supports this view.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's procedures for keeping pupils safe in school and responding to concerns are fit for purpose. Leaders, staff and governors are well aware of current statutory requirements and make sure that these are met in full. Importantly, they also understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. This message is flagged up clearly and repeatedly through documentation, governors' meetings and records from staff meetings. Whenever staff have had cause to act, and there have been numerous instances since the previous inspection, they have done so with proper regard for agreed processes. Staff have made sure that key information is passed on to relevant agencies, such as social services or the police, and all records are kept up to date and in a secure place.

Staff receive regular training and understand their responsibility under the 'Prevent' duty. Leaders have assessed local risks and taken appropriate action when comments or information received have caused concern.

The school's systems for checking on pupils' whereabouts are very efficient. Any unexplained absences are followed up immediately. Good communication between home and school means that minor concerns are usually 'nipped in the bud'. Any concerns from parents or pupils about bullying or unkind behaviour are investigated swiftly and resolved.

Inspection findings

- You provide committed and effective leadership. You have been quick to respond to the decline in progress measures in reading and writing. You recognise that the new assessment procedures had 'caught you out' and are determined that this will not happen again. Already, you have put numerous measures in place. Evidence gathered during this inspection found that your actions are driving progress measures back up. This 'on the ball' leadership, coupled with your school's long-standing and high-quality work to support families and pupils with particular needs and difficulties, are key reasons why the school's overall effectiveness remains good at this time. The local authority recognises that the school's performance in 2016 was not strong but has confidence in your leadership and the staff team. Evidence gathered during this inspection supports this view.
- Staff take responsibility for improving aspects of their own classroom practice. Under guidance from phase leaders, teachers watch one another at work in order to learn from effective practice. Teachers have started to film some of their teaching and use these clips to analyse and reflect upon their teaching and to share it with others. This approach is indicative of the evaluative attitudes evident across the staff team.

- As noted by the previous inspection, the vast majority of children start school with levels of knowledge and skill that are below those typical for their age. Their literacy and communication skills are often particularly low. In response, the early years provision focuses heavily on developing key basic skills and is increasingly effective in preparing children for learning in key stage 1. In the last three years, the proportions of children reaching a good level of development have risen each year. Even so, many children start Year 1 with below-average levels of attainment and, despite largely good progress across the key stage, below-average attainment is still evident at the end of Year 2.
- However, instead of accepting this as 'the way things are', you have taken action to raise expectations and improve children's readiness for school. Since September 2015, you have started taking two-year-olds into a most worthwhile and well-attended 'time for twos' provision. These newly initiated sessions are clearly making a difference. Adults model good-quality language and help children to learn helpful habits that assist their smooth start to school. You give a high priority to early literacy skills and provide children with experiences that fuel their imagination and curiosity about the world around them. There is no doubt that children who have been through the school's 'time for twos' provision are better prepared for learning in the years ahead.
- You do not just focus on pupils' in-school learning. The school's work to support families is a notable and significant strength. Indeed, in recent times Ofsted noted this in a good-practice report about adult education and home-school links in disadvantaged areas. During this inspection, various sessions for parents were running; some sessions focus on adult education and others on ways that parents can support their children's learning at home. Several parents who spoke with me highlighted this aspect of your work. They also commented positively about the help you provide to children and families who are experiencing difficulties, either at home or at school. Inspection evidence confirms that your attention to welfare matters and all-round family support are second to none.
- Another strength of the school is the quality and impact of phonics teaching. In the last two years, you have invested a lot of time and money in resources to support phonics and reading across the school. Staff receive regular training and you and your team keep a close eye on classroom practice. All of this has resulted in teaching sessions that are well organised, carefully structured and very effective. The results are plain to see: year after year, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has risen, and in 2016 the figure stood at 85%. This is above the national figure and a remarkable achievement given pupils' starting points on entry to school. Pupils' improved and improving ability to decode words is helping them with the mechanics of reading and writing. Even so, there is still more work to be done to help middle-ability pupils, especially in key stage 2, to develop their literacy skills.
- Comprehension and inference skills are key areas where more input is needed. Pupils who can identify, read, and accurately spell many words still miss the meaning behind some of the texts they read. You have identified this as a key development area. Staff training, classroom checks by leaders, and teachers' lesson plans all flag this up as the number one priority. You are right to do so.

- This weakness in literacy skills has been a key factor in keeping standards in reading and writing below average at the end of both key stages. Standards in mathematics, however, have been closer to average. On the other hand, progress measures across key stage 2 in both English and mathematics have presented a strong picture over time. In 2013, 2014 and 2015, overall progress measures consistently placed the school in the top 35% of schools nationally, with mathematics progress being in the top 15% each year.
- In 2016, national assessment arrangements changed and the school's progress measures dropped, especially in reading and particularly for the middle-ability pupils. This inspection focused heavily on the reasons for this and what you and your team are doing in response. It is clear that you are doing a lot to make sure that progress rates climb back up.
- For a start, the school environment is set up to promote reading. Attractive displays of books and pictures that prompt questions and generate interest in literature can be found all around the building. In class, pupils read regularly and for real purpose in many different subjects. A recent development sees members of staff acting as reading mentors for targeted pupils. Each day, after school, these mentors read with pupils, talk to them about books and help them with other aspects of their learning. This is evidently making a difference. Pupils who spoke or read with me could give specific examples of how the school has helped them to improve their skills. In a literacy lesson, a group of pupils explained how classwork was helping them to widen their vocabulary by introducing them to words such as 'jeopardy' or 'callous'. They were able to make suggestions about why an author might chose to use such words. Elsewhere, pupils readily reach for a dictionary or thesaurus when necessary. The simple eloquence of some of the pupils' comments about your work to help them enjoy words and reading is one clear measure of the impact of your work.
- Other, more tangible, measures include your tracking system which, although it is at an early stage of development, shows that most pupils are making at least good progress. This tracking system highlights progress against specific strands of learning. Staff are able to use this information to target their teaching with greater precision and to organise different ability groups. You regularly review progress and the grouping of pupils so no one is left in the wrong group. Nevertheless, this well-informed and accurate new assessment system is not yet being used to its full potential by all staff to spot potential underachievement.
- In writing, you have also taken action to boost progress and raise standards. Each class has a progress wall where pupils' writing from different points in the year is stored. This provides a quick and easily accessible reference for pupils and staff to check on the progress being made by individuals. On a day-to-day basis, work in pupils' books shows improvement over the term and is another indicator that standards are heading upwards. In addition, teaching helps pupils to build up and apply their developing skills in a sequential and meaningful way. In one session, for example, pupils were guided to create the 'bare bones' of a story before then moving on to adding the 'meat'. This simple analogy, managed well by the teacher, gave pupils the structure and confidence they needed in order to complete a lengthy piece of writing.

- Over time, the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, have done well in reading, writing and mathematics at Wren's Nest Primary School. Even when overall progress measures dropped in 2016, these pupils made better-than-average progress and reached the standards that they should. This is because the quality of teaching is effective and pupils who can cope with demanding work are given plenty of it, rise to the challenge and experience success.
- Pupils say they enjoy school. Attendance rates have risen over time and are in line with national averages. Punctuality has also improved, helped to a large extent by the 'early birds' before-school care that currently caters for over 100 pupils. At 'early birds', pupils can eat breakfast, enjoy a range of cooperative activities or get on with their homework. This early-morning provision is well supervised and gives pupils a good start to the day ahead.
- Your team make an extra effort and call upon a range of expert services to help pupils who struggle with aspects of school life. In the main, you are successful with this endeavour. During this inspection, I noted several examples of your effective work to support vulnerable pupils. A nurture group, which runs daily, offers a safe and peaceful retreat to those who need it. In class, teachers make expectations clear and pupils understand that good behaviour will be commended and poor behaviour will be challenged. Rewards and sanctions are applied with consistency and most pupils respond positively to this. However, from time to time some pupils are unable to cope with school and this has resulted in five permanent exclusions over the past three years. School records show that all the proper procedures were followed and that this ultimate sanction was only applied as a last resort when other strategies had failed.
- You take pupils on a range of school trips to support classroom learning and stimulate curiosity. During this inspection, the Year 1 pupils wrapped up in wet-weather gear to visit a field study centre. At other times in the year, older pupils take part in a residential visit and all pupils visit museums, theatres and art galleries. These, and other enrichment activities, broaden pupils' knowledge and experience of the world and raise awareness of the opportunities that are open to them.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- build further on their existing work to accelerate progress and so lift standards in reading and writing, especially for the middle ability pupils, by making sure that:
 - the recently introduced tracking system is used to full and best effect by all staff so that any pupil who is making less than good progress is picked up swiftly
 - teaching helps pupils to develop the comprehension skills they need to cope with the demands of the school curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Pye
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, members of your leadership team and teaching staff. I also met with the school administrator and two governors and had a telephone conversation with a local authority officer. I carried out short observations of teaching in most year groups and looked at pupils' work. I observed extra-support sessions, before- and after-school activities, and heard pupils read. I talked with pupils in lessons, on the playground and at lunchtime. I also spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day.

I paid particular attention to several key lines of enquiry. These included: pupils' progress and attainment in reading and writing, the school's approach to behaviour management, the impact of additional provision in the early years, challenge for the most able and the quality of phonics teaching. Other lines of enquiry related to aspects of leadership, assessment and safeguarding.

By the end of the inspection, there were 15 recent responses on Parent View and 12 written comments. There were 20 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. I took account of staff and parents' responses and talked with pupils about how school staff listened to their views. I looked at a number of documents, including: pupils' progress information, the school's own evaluation of its performance, information about the work of the governing body, records of leaders' checks on the quality of teaching and learning, and several school policy documents. I also checked the school's website and the procedures for keeping pupils safe. I asked members of staff and parents about safeguarding matters.