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Mr Leon Robichaud  
Headteacher  
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MK45 3BX

Dear Mr Robichaud

### **Short inspection of Wilstead Lower School**

Following my visit to the school on 24 January 2017, 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 March 2012.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education at the school since the previous inspection. There have been many changes at the school during this period. All members of the current teaching staff were appointed since the previous inspection. You were appointed in April 2014. Since your appointment, you have worked effectively with staff to introduce a new, improved curriculum which inspires pupils and helps them to develop a love of learning. You have also had a strong focus on improving teaching and learning across the school. The impact of your work is reflected in the improved outcomes at the end of the early years and key stage 1, and also in the quality of work seen in many of the pupils' books during this inspection.

At the previous inspection, inspectors identified some weaknesses in the teaching of mathematics. They also asked school leaders to use assessment information more effectively to evaluate the impact of actions taken to improve teaching and learning. You have taken effective action to address each of these issues. Mathematics teaching is now typically good, and school leaders are using assessment information regularly, to review the progress that pupils are making in reading, writing and mathematics. Not only is this process helping you to measure the impact of teaching on pupils' progress, it is also helping you to identify children who are falling behind in their learning so that you can provide additional support.

As a result of your work:

- the school now provides an exciting and engaging curriculum that prepares pupils well for the next stage of their education
- pupils are achieving well in reading, writing and mathematics
- pupils behave extremely well and enjoy learning
- staff are fully supportive of your drive for further improvements
- parents appreciate the school's work and rightly believe that the school is well led and well managed.

You share an ambition with staff and governors for the school to become outstanding and recognise that further work is required to ensure that all teaching is consistently at least good and that pupils achieve well in subjects across the whole curriculum.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. School leaders, including governors, do all that they can to ensure that pupils are safe, well cared for and protected. Regular training has ensured that staff and governors understand their responsibilities and know what to do if they have concerns. For example, training was recently provided for all members of staff on how to keep pupils safe from the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding policies and procedures are fit for purpose, and that records are detailed and accurate. Systems and procedures are kept under constant review to ensure that best practice is maintained and the school keeps precise records of the checks that are made on adults before they are appointed at the school. As a result of these actions, pupils say that they feel safe while in school, and almost every parent who responded to Parent View, or was spoken to during this inspection, agrees.

### **Inspection findings**

- Children get off to a good start in the early years. Staff ensure that there is a smooth transition into school by visiting children at home or in the pre-school that is situated on the school site. Parents value the opportunity that they are given to contribute to the early assessments that are made of children's skills and abilities. Children are taught well and make good progress across the early years in all areas of learning. In 2016, the percentage of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year was above the national average.

- Pupils make good progress in mathematics. In most classes, they are provided with regular opportunities to use and apply their mathematical knowledge and skills to solve problems and undertake investigations. Although key stage 1 mathematics results were above the national average in 2016, school leaders are aware that further work is needed in some year groups. They are providing appropriate support and challenge to embed, and further develop, the quality of teaching and learning in this key area.
- Reading is taught well. Children in the early years and pupils in Year 1 develop a good understanding of phonics. The percentage of pupils who passed the phonics check at the end of Year 1 was above the national average in 2016, as it had been in the previous year. At the end of key stage 1, the proportions of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading and those working at greater depth were above the national average. During this inspection, pupils from Year 4 read fluently to the inspector and spoke about their reading habits. They demonstrated a good knowledge of different authors and many pupils read widely and often.
- The school provides a broad and exciting curriculum for pupils to study. One room in the school has been transformed into a museum, and contains many fascinating artefacts, which teachers use to generate interest in the topics being studied. For example, a ship's lantern from the museum recently formed part of the introduction to a project on RMS Titanic in Year 2. Those pupils whom I spoke to about this topic demonstrated an impressive understanding about the ship and the events that occurred during its maiden voyage. However, in this class and others across the school, the quality of written work in topic books does not reflect pupils' abilities. Teachers appear to have lower expectations of what pupils can achieve in these subjects.
- Pupils who are in danger of falling behind in their learning are well supported. They benefit from teaching that is generally of good quality and careful, accurate assessments of their needs. Improvements to the way that school leaders track pupils' progress are helping to ensure that additional support is provided where necessary. The impact of this support is also carefully monitored in order to ensure that it is having the desired impact. As a result, these pupils make good progress.
- Pupils generally make good progress in writing. The work seen in pupils' English books show that they have regular opportunities to write at length and for different purposes. However, there is too much variation in how teachers respond to errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling. Although work is always marked, some teachers do not highlight or correct basic errors and this often leads to mistakes being repeated. The quality of handwriting and presentation also needs to be improved. Teachers do not model good practice and do not encourage handwriting development or presentation skills well enough.

- Pupils benefit from regular trips out of school, including an annual visit for Year 4 pupils to a partner school in Denmark. These trips, and in-school projects, such as the school's work with the Royal Shakespeare Company, contribute to the effective promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The activities are regularly reviewed by older pupils and published in blogs on the school's website.
- Parents are highly appreciative of the experiences provided for their children. One parent said on Parent View, 'The school brings in outside actors and other educational specialists to help bring learning to life. I can tell that the school has every child's needs at the core of its values.'
- The school values the support it receives from the local authority. Regular visits from the local authority adviser are carefully planned and help to provide leaders, including governors, with external evaluations of different aspects of the school's work. Governors also value the training opportunities provided through the local authority.
- Governance is effective. Many governors are relatively new to their roles but have ensured that they have had appropriate training. Governors understand their role and are committed to supporting the school in making the necessary steps to become outstanding.

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

In order to ensure that the school continues to improve, school leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- ensure that the school's broad curriculum is used more effectively to develop pupils' writing
- provide greater clarity to teachers about how they respond to errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling
- improve the quality of handwriting and presentation.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Tomkow  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During this short inspection I followed a number of lines of enquiry, including:

- Have school leaders taken effective action to address weaknesses in the teaching of mathematics identified at the previous inspection?
- Are school leaders making better use of assessment information as they were asked to do at the previous inspection?
- Do pupils make good progress in subjects across the wider curriculum?
- Are safeguarding arrangements effective?
- How well are pupils achieving in key stage 2?

During the inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher and the deputy headteacher. I also met with five governors, including the chair of the governing body, and a representative of the local authority. I spoke with pupils informally during the lunchbreak and met with pupils from Year 2 and Year 4 to listen to them read and speak with them about behaviour and safety. I scrutinised a range of documents, policies and assessment information. I made short visits to all classrooms to observe teaching and learning and looked at work in pupils' books. I also considered responses from parents to Parent View, the Ofsted questionnaire.