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Mrs Suzanne Webster-Smith
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Dear Mrs Webster-Smith

Short inspection of Uplands Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 28 March 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 November 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 provide strong and determined leadership which has enabled the school to recover from a downturn in pupils' progress in 2014. Under your clear guidance and direction, since being appointed in September 2014, you have successfully reversed the previous dip in achievement and brought about further improvements in teaching. You are well supported by a very effective deputy headteacher who, like you, demonstrates an absolute passion and energy for ensuring that pupils receive the best possible learning experiences at Uplands. You communicate your values well, which has been effective in channelling the efforts of all staff in making learning dynamic and meaningful for pupils.

Governance is a strength of the school. Governors work closely with leaders, adopting an 'eyes on – hands off' approach to provide effective strategic direction and respectful challenge. School improvement plans, identified as a weakness in the last inspection, are now well-crafted and measurable, and target appropriately the areas for development. Leaders and governors know precisely what they need to achieve for the school to become outstanding. They are well on the journey to achieving this.

Teachers make learning enjoyable for pupils through planning worthwhile tasks and memorable experiences. For example, in a physical education lesson, pupils created

their own challenging dance sequences to a popular Ed Sheeran song. They worked collaboratively, performing movements with good agility and rhythm. Pupils show very positive attitudes to their learning and behave exceptionally well. They are courteous and polite, and always willing to help each other. The school's overarching school rule of 'respect for all' permeates every aspect of school life and makes the environment one of nurture, cheerfulness and calm.

Pupils are excellent ambassadors for their school because they value their education, are proud of their achievements and can articulate clearly how teachers help them to learn well. Pupils work hard in lessons because that is what teachers expect. In every class, pupils demonstrate a thirst for learning, are keen to participate and share their knowledge and understanding.

Parents are enthusiastic in their praise for the school. They recognise the work of committed staff and the level of care the school provides to their children. Parents also appreciate the extracurricular opportunities and the wide range of clubs available such as hockey, gymnastics and orchestra. These are well attended by pupils and add an extra dimension to their learning. A positive comment by one parent summed up the views of many, referring to 'An enriched curriculum delivered by genuinely caring and talented people.'

Leaders have tackled effectively the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The quality of teaching has continued to improve, although you recognise that there is still further work to do to ensure consistency in the teaching of writing. Middle leaders play a much greater part in raising pupils' achievement through their work. They have begun to develop assessment systems to check more carefully on the progress pupils make in foundation subjects. However, these systems have not yet been established for all subjects.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding at Uplands which is understood by everyone. Members of staff told me safeguarding is 'right at the forefront' of all their work, and this is convincingly evident. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Those responsible for keeping pupils safe are meticulous in their recording, reporting and organisation of safeguarding matters. Leaders effectively utilise the services of the local authority to conduct termly safeguarding reviews and act quickly on any advice or recommendations given. Governors also carry out their statutory responsibilities well. They have good oversight of safeguarding and carry out regular checks.

Pupils are very well-informed about how to stay safe because of the school's excellent approach to teaching about safeguarding. For example, pupils complete safeguarding homework tasks and visit places such as 'Safeside', an experiential learning centre where they learn how to think and act safely. Pupils spoke knowledgeably about their experiences and what they have learned. For example, pupils have a good knowledge of password protection and mobile phone etiquette.

Inspection findings

- At the start of my visit, we discussed the potential key lines of enquiry to be pursued during the day in addition to the effectiveness of safeguarding. We agreed to explore how well writing is taught; what teachers are doing to engage boys in reading; and the effectiveness of middle leaders in strengthening the curriculum.
- Leaders have been disappointed with the progress some pupils make in writing. Rates of progress for pupils leaving key stage 2 in 2015 and 2016 were lower than the national average, particularly for higher-attaining pupils. However, leaders have worked hard to rectify this issue and put in place effective measures to improve progress. Teachers worked with a local authority consultant to develop their expertise in teaching writing. As a result, teachers use their enhanced subject knowledge to teach writing well. Pupils write with confidence for a range of different purposes and audiences. For example, Year 4 pupils created good posters advertising a gladiator fight as part of their topic on the Romans. However, not all teachers provide enough opportunities to write at length over a sustained period of time and develop pupils' writing stamina.
- Lessons are carefully planned to meet the needs of most pupils well. Teachers skilfully model the writing process and support pupils effectively to edit and improve their work. For example, Year 5 pupils redrafted work and wrote some powerful descriptive narratives based on 'The highwayman' poem by Alfred Noyes. Work in books clearly shows that the majority of current pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are making strong progress in writing.
- Leaders acknowledge that teachers may have been overcautious in their assessment of pupils' writing in 2016, mainly as a result of unfamiliarity with the new national assessment arrangements. In response to this, you have provided more opportunities for moderation to check on the accuracy of assessments. You agree that there is still further work to do to ensure that teachers assess writing accurately at greater depth.
- In 2016, there was quite a stark difference between the progress of boys and girls in reading by the end of key stage 2. Girls' progress was stronger than that of boys. Leaders responded quickly and put in place a range of actions to promote boys' reading. Teachers adapt planning to make learning experiences more 'boy-friendly'. For example, they choose carefully selected texts that appeal to boys and build an element of choice into how pupils present their work. These strategies are well received by boys and help them to engage more and make better progress in their reading.
- Most pupils enjoy reading and can read accurately with good fluency and understanding. Teachers progressively build pupils' comprehension and engagement in reading through weekly 'book talk' lessons. These require pupils to think deeply about what they are reading, discuss with others and justify their thinking. For example, older pupils were challenged to discuss the meaning of pop lyrics by the band Run-D.M.C. They correctly explained difficult words such as 'disillusion' in the lyrics.
- Some boys benefit from carefully planned interventions which enable them to

make more rapid progress in their reading. However, the school's own assessment information shows that an attainment gap still exists between boys' and girls' reading in most year groups. Despite leaders' efforts, there are still some boys who have not yet developed enough interest in reading for pleasure. These boys need further encouragement to read so they practise more regularly and advance their reading skills.

- You have strengthened the school's leadership capacity by investing time and resources in developing your middle leaders. For example, they have been coached in how to interpret and use pupils' assessment information. Middle leaders value and benefit from the training they receive. They are empowered to lead their subject areas well and implement plans to enhance the quality of teaching. As a result, middle leaders have become more effective in driving improvement.
- Middle leaders' checks on the progress pupils make in the different curriculum subjects varies because there are not yet effective assessment systems in place for all of the foundation subjects.
- All leaders contribute well to providing a curriculum which engages and excites pupils, supporting them well to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding. The curriculum is enhanced by a range of visits and visitors organised by subject leaders. For example, pupils presented science projects which were shared with an audience at the school 'science fair'. Pupils with the best projects were invited to attend the 'Big Bang' science event at the National Exhibition Centre.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide all pupils with more opportunities to develop their skills and stamina to write at length
- teachers offer reluctant readers, particularly boys, more encouragement and support in reading so they read more regularly and accelerate their progress
- all teachers are fully secure in assessing pupils' writing at greater depth
- subject leaders develop ways to assess pupils' progress in all foundation subjects.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Wolverhampton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tim Hill
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held discussions with you and the deputy headteacher about the school's progress since the last inspection and current priorities. I met with a group of staff, including teaching assistants, to ask them about safeguarding. I also held a meeting with governors and spoke to the local authority inspector. You, the deputy headteacher and I visited classes in all year groups where we observed the quality of teaching and learning, talked to pupils about their work and looked at their books. I also held a discussion with several middle leaders. I looked at and discussed with leaders the self-evaluation of the school's effectiveness.

I observed pupils playing outside at breaktime and gathered their views on safety. I held two discussions with groups of pupils. One of these focused specifically on reading. I took into consideration the views of 28 pupils through Ofsted's online pupil survey. I heard several pupils read aloud. I evaluated a range of documents, including the school improvement plan and records about keeping pupils safe. I also considered 30 responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire.

The views of parents were considered through the 33 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I also spoke to parents at the end of the school day.