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Mrs Claire Butler
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Butler

Short inspection of Woodhouse Academy

Following my visit to the school on 27 June 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There is a sense of purpose in the classrooms and around the school. You are proud of your school and seek to give your pupils resilience and confidence so that they can learn new skills and gain knowledge. Pupils are proud of their school and speak supportively of their teachers, appreciating the help and guidance they receive. You, the senior leaders and other leaders at the school have a shared vision and the determination and capacity to improve the school.

Parents and staff are supportive of you and your leadership team. They speak positively of your care, leadership and your teachers' detailed knowledge of their children. A typical response to the Parent View questionnaire was: 'I feel very lucky that my child attends this school.'

You took over as headteacher in September 2016 and have ensured that there are clearer lines of accountability within the school. With the support of your leadership team and other leaders, you have focused on the curriculum and have ensured that pupils are provided with a good range of curricular as well as extra-curricular opportunities and experiences. Strong emphasis is given to music and the arts, with pupils given opportunities to experience activities such as sculpting and African drumming. On the day of my visit, Year 6 were benefiting from a visit to an outdoor education centre.

You have introduced a new behaviour ladder, which is understood and valued by pupils. Staff and pupils agree that disruption to learning is rare. The atmosphere in school is lively, welcoming and supportive to its pupils and staff. Pupils are polite and courteous around the school. In the lessons that I visited, pupils engaged enthusiastically with their learning. Communication between senior leaders and staff is now much improved and this has brought about improved tracking of pupils' progress, which informs more timely intervention to support pupils' learning. Leaders are beginning to show an increased focus on shorter-term milestones when developing strategies for improvement. They are starting to evaluate the impact of the actions taken and amending their actions as required. Where this is most consistent, there is evidence of more rapid progress, for example, in writing and in mathematics but there is more to do to hone their practice.

You are keen to remain outward facing. Having converted as an academy in July 2014, you retain strong local links with six local first schools as an active partner in the Biddulph Partnership Trust as well as one other local middle school and one local high school. This partnership work provides learning and transition opportunities for your pupils but also helps you share effective practice and resources. You have been working with a local national leader of education who has been able to quality assure the work of the school. This, alongside the external consultants you have used to support your improvement work, has provided governors with additional evidence to support them in their role.

Inspectors in their last report noted that the school should make improvements in some aspects of teaching and learning. Since then, the school has developed and recruited a strong group of middle leaders who have played a key role in leading further improvements in teaching quality. Best practice is shared and continuing professional development is tailored to suit individual teachers' needs.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that there is a strong culture of safeguarding within the school. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders, including governors, take their safeguarding responsibilities seriously. The school works closely with a range of other agencies when necessary and referral processes are robust and secure. All staff receive training across a range of areas. Staff receive regular updates about safeguarding. Pastoral leaders and other staff work closely together to support vulnerable pupils.

Pupils are taught about how to keep themselves safe from a variety of risks. Tutorial sessions, personal, social and health education lessons, and assemblies are used for this purpose. Pupils feel safe in school. The majority of pupils agree that if bullying happens, it is reported and dealt with robustly. However, parental feedback shows that a few parents are concerned about how effectively leaders tackle bullying.

Inspection findings

- Good-quality subject specialist teaching in all years means that, from the beginning of Year 5 to when pupils leave the school at the end of Year 8, pupils make good progress in most subjects. Current data shared by the school during the inspection shows that the best progress is made in reading, mathematics and music. Overall, girls make the best progress.
- You are aware that progress in mathematics, as measured by outcomes in last year's end of key stage 2 tests, was below the national average. Leaders have concentrated on the teaching of arithmetic, problem-solving and reasoning and have ensured that the tracking of all pupils' progress is robust. More timely interventions have ensured that projections for this year's key stage 2 results are more favourable.
- Reading is a strength in the school. Pupils enjoy their reading and answer questions about the texts with enthusiasm and interest.
- Pupils' progress in writing is slower because pupils are not given the opportunity to produce extended pieces of writing in all subjects. Subject-specific spelling mistakes aren't always corrected by teachers.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress in most subjects. Key stage 2 results in 2016 showed that disadvantaged pupils at the school made better progress than other pupils nationally in reading and in writing. School data shared during the inspection shows that disadvantaged pupils are making positive progress in most subjects and in both key stages. Work seen in books supports this.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are given effective support. A key worker is attached to each pupil who oversees their progress. Strategies are personalised for each pupil to support their learning.
- Attendance for vulnerable groups, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, is improving and is now above the national average. This is as a result of a focused and personalised approach where the school has employed a variety of strategies to celebrate attendance. Pupils were proud to show their 'attendometers' displayed in classrooms and spoke with enthusiasm about celebration assemblies.
- The quality of teaching is good and improving. Weekly learning walks by leaders support the monitoring of teaching. However, sometimes teachers do not currently provide consistently high levels of challenge for more able pupils.
- Pupils make the most progress where there is a culture of high expectation. Occasionally, teachers are too accepting of poorly presented work.
- Questioning is usually good and pupils are encouraged to think and develop their responses. However, the level of demand is not consistent in all classrooms.
- Your governing body understands the strengths of the school and areas for development. Its members have a realistic and ambitious plan for the school and this helps improve the capacity for further improvement. They responded with determination following last year's key stage 2 outcomes in mathematics and have held leaders to account effectively to secure improvement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- further improve teaching so that all groups of pupils, in both key stages, make consistently strong progress by ensuring that every teacher:
 - has high expectations of the quality of work that pupils complete in lessons
 - consistently challenges the most able pupils
 - encourages opportunities for pupils to write at length in subjects other than in English
- sharpen leadership by ensuring that leaders set clear milestones in order to check carefully and regularly the impact that their actions are having.

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

Yours sincerely

Richard Gill
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, members of your leadership team and other school leaders, including four governors. We scrutinised a range of documents, including safeguarding policies and the school's analysis of pupils' achievement. I visited, with school leaders, seven parts of lessons to observe teaching and learning across a range of subjects, to look at pupils' work and to listen to pupils read. I met with pupils formally as well as holding informal discussions with them. I considered the 53 responses to Parent View and the 47 free-text parental responses to Ofsted's survey. Consideration was also given to the 35 staff responses to Ofsted's survey and the 25 pupil responses to the pupil questionnaire.