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Mr Robert Foster
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Dear Mr Foster

Short inspection of Willow Bank Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 18 July 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 September 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Aspects of the school's work, though, are better aligned to a judgement of outstanding –notably, the school's leadership and its contribution to pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. As one parent commented, 'There is so much to love about this school. There are assemblies for us to attend, Christmas plays, singing in the playground and so much more which create a wonderful community.'

A second parent commented, 'I think this is a superb school. It has excellent teachers, headteacher and support staff who care about academics and student welfare in equal measures.' Every parent who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school to other parents. In summary, this is because you exhibit careful, considerate, thoughtful and 'inspirational' leadership. Your evaluation of the school's overall effectiveness is open, honest and clear. You know what the school does well and you also know candidly what else is required to make it even better. We agreed that progress outcomes for pupils still need to rise for the school to be judged outstanding overall.

Governors, staff, pupils and parents acknowledge the positive manner in which you lead the school. All recognise the way you nurture staff and pupils' well-being. Your leadership is underpinned with a clear moral purpose and explicit set of laudable values. Another parent stated, 'Mr Foster is an excellent headteacher who sets an

environment and a culture of inclusiveness for all children.' Your ambition for the pupils is shared by all so that staff give freely of their time to support the outstanding range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils benefit from, among others, trips to Wales, Westminster and other Wokingham schools to take part in musical or sporting activities. Pupils enjoy participating in clubs based at the school, such as chess, choir and contemporary dance. Your own passion for music is evident in the provision of the 'amazing' orchestra and the multiple musical tuition and performance opportunities available to all pupils. A highlight of the inspection was the choral singing in assembly of the song you composed to celebrate the school's approach to British values.

These extra-curricular experiences consolidate the very strong curriculum that the school provides. English and mathematics are taught well so that pupils acquire the basic skills they need and are suitably prepared for the next stage of their education. In addition to these core subjects, teaching is strong in science and is supported practically – for example, by the presence of fish, insects and African giant snails – in classrooms, in well-maintained and hygienic tanks. Similarly, pupils are provided with age-appropriate opportunities in design and technology, where product design and nutrition are taught equally effectively. Pupils told me how much they enjoyed learning in art, and their knowledge and skills in music exceed those found typically among pupils of the same age.

You use the primary physical education and sport premium funding sensibly to ensure that pupils benefit from high-quality specialist teaching. Pupils in Year 3 were making strong progress in learning how to execute the high jump accurately as part of a sequence of suitably tailored physical education lessons. Pupils are coached in actual sports such as athletics and football and are thus able to compete, often successfully, in local and regional competitions.

There is something for every pupil. This is because you are determined that all will do as well as they can. This principle extends to the subtle and sensitive provision for the small number of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Consequently, the progress of these pupils is good from their individual starting points.

Safeguarding is effective.

This simple judgement potentially masks the exceptional work the school does with regard to safeguarding. On the rare occasion when someone new joins the team, the background checks you make on them are suitably thorough. The school business manager maintains a secure record of these checks which is overseen by the appointed safeguarding governor. The school business manager conducts equally stringent checks on casual staff, volunteers or contractors undertaking work on behalf of Wokingham Borough Council.

Your determination to ensure that pupils flourish and are safe has contributed to the creation of a calm and orderly environment based on excellent relationships between adults and children. Your behaviour policy, which emphasises the benefits

of good conduct, results in extremely well-mannered, positive pupils and very rare examples of misbehaviour. You have trained pupils to sort out their own disputes, or ask for help from peers to restore good relationships when they break down. Pupils understand fully the differences between right and wrong and things that are fair or unjust. Praise far outweighs criticism in every exchange between adults and pupils. Rewards are used far more frequently than punishments. The recent visit of an ice cream van as a whole-school reward was welcomed by all.

Parents appreciate the school's work to encourage good behaviour and promote positive attitudes to learning: 'Under Mr Foster's leadership the school has flourished, supporting children in the transition from infant to secondary school by encouraging them to take responsibility for their own behaviour as well as supporting and encouraging those around them.' Parents also commend the school for its determination to keep them informed. You, and the staff, work well with parents. You are easily available to them at the beginning and end of the day. Parents comment that you listen to any concerns they may have, and address them appropriately. This feeds into extremely detailed knowledge about each child, their individual strengths and weaknesses, where they are succeeding and any potential barriers they face. Consequently, any child at risk is quickly identified. You ensure that all staff training is up to date and that all can identify any signs of neglect or distress. Several families were keen to point out where the school's work had helped them get through difficult times such as bereavement or family breakdown.

Inspection findings

- This inspection was undertaken to judge how well pupils currently on roll are doing. I wanted to investigate how well you were supporting the most able pupils to achieve as much as they can, and how pupils' progress overall is being tracked against the requirements of the new national curriculum.
- Everyone, staff and pupils, at Willow Bank is happy. All thrive. The culture leaders have created over time is celebrated by all. Noticeably, the retention of staff is remarkable. Teachers only leave when they have to retire. Staff absence is negligible. Every member of staff who responded to Ofsted's confidential online survey strongly agreed that they 'enjoy working at the school'. Pupils' attendance is exemplary. A tiny proportion of pupils are persistently absent. You have not excluded a pupil permanently since joining the school four years ago and you struggled to remember any incidents of fixed-term exclusions.
- With the staff, you have built an effective learning community based on mutual trust and respect. Pupils love your weekly headteacher's tea party. You use this to engage pupils in open and honest debate about how well the school is doing. A pupil is recorded as saying, 'Some things you will like and some things you won't like, but they help you when you don't find things easy.' This is a clear example of how you take seriously pupils' opinions and act on them to improve the school overall.
- The school's contribution to pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. In addition to a well-led and thoughtful

formal curriculum, you provide a strong role model for staff and pupils of appropriate adult behaviour. A parent wrote, 'The children are well behaved and courteous and this comes from a deep respect for Mr Foster and the staff.'

- All staff adopt your inclusive approach. They treat each pupil as a unique individual. Through their actions they demonstrate to pupils the importance of tolerance. You encourage pupils to understand democratic participation. Pupils like the system of peer mediation which has reduced to virtually zero the incidents of perceived bullying. This is remarkable.
- Pupils' progress from key stage 1 to 2 is the single, most important, remaining consideration for the school. You have addressed this in your honest, open and realistic assessment of the school's performance.
- The local authority's school improvement officer has rightly challenged you to ensure that staff focus on this aspect of the school's work continuously. Governors similarly hold you to account for pupils' progress and support the range of activities you have put in place to raise standards further.
- According to publicly held data, the most able pupils do not regularly go on to write at greater depth or exceed age-expected levels in reading or mathematics. This means that their progress does not compare as favourably with other high-attaining pupils nationally, even though they work hard and are a credit to the school.
- Current work to align the school's assessment practice in English and mathematics even more closely to the new national curriculum requirements is timely. Leaders' normal, thoughtful approach will help you evaluate, and then implement, the most effective changes to support even greater progress of the most able pupils. You will be aided in this by the recent adoption of a progress-tracking system. This system is already producing helpful information about what each pupil knows, understands and can do in each of reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teachers' skilful work in assessing pupils' writing contributes well to this database as well as directly to pupils' progress. It also contributes to leaders' understanding of any gaps or where extra work may be needed.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- pupils' progress in all subjects continues to increase so that overall performance at least matches national expectations
- the most able pupils are challenged to work at greater depth in writing and exceed age-expected standards 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 Wokingham. This letter will

be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Simon Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I observed learning jointly with you during two tours of the school. We visited each class. I met with a group of pupils and took into account 77 responses from pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5 to Ofsted's confidential online pupil survey. I spoke to several parents informally before and after school, and took into account 105 responses to Parent View. A total of 74 parents submitted a free-text comment through that system. I met with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body and also with the school's long-standing school improvement officer. I met with you regularly and other leaders, including the subject leaders for personal, social, health, citizenship and economic education, and I considered 20 responses to Ofsted's confidential online staff survey. I reviewed a wide range of the school's documentation, especially information relating to your work to keep pupils safe. You showed me information about pupils' progress and attainment, including the outcomes of recent standardised national tests. I also examined records of visits from governors, the minutes of some of their meetings and your logs of any incidents of behaviour which fell short of the school's expectations.