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Mrs Tracey How  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs How

### **Short inspection of Laburnum Lower School**

Following my visit to the school on 5 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 June 2013.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Much of your ethos is focused on providing pupils with a strong moral code. You develop this through the promotion of your chosen monthly values. Pupils, staff and governors frequently referred to these values over the course of the inspection. In assembly, pupils learned about 'courage and challenge' as they considered moving onto new schools or classes. Comments from parents show how much they appreciate this aspect of the school's work.

You have a very stable staff team, and over 75% of staff who responded to their online questionnaire were present at the previous inspection. All staff are proud to work at the school and understand the aims and values that are promoted. One comment from staff echoed the sentiment of others: 'I am extremely proud to work here. Everyone goes above and beyond for the benefit of the children.'

One significant change to the leadership is due to happen. You are leaving the school to take up a new headship position in September. Governors have taken care to maintain the momentum of school improvement and have implemented a period of effective transition for the incoming headteacher.

You are ably supported by your deputy headteacher and other middle leaders. They are skilled and well placed to continue a strong focus on pupils making the best personal and academic progress under a new headteacher.

Governors have an accurate view of what is working well and what could be even better. They have clear roles and responsibilities and are dedicated to their work. Governors have a detailed knowledge of the strengths of the school and areas for further improvement. They visit often and effectively hold school leaders to account for the progress that pupils make in all aspects of their education. Governors have played their full part in preparing for the change to a primary school in 2018. They have rigorous plans to ensure that the many strengths of the school community remain.

You have maintained the many strengths that were identified at the time of the previous inspection. The teaching of reading is strong. In 2016, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in their phonic screening check rose significantly to over 90%. This is set to continue this year due to the good quality of teaching they receive.

Children get a good start at Laburnum Lower school. Children are well cared for and take part in exciting activities in Nursery that help them develop their language and number skills. Parents appreciate your approach to flexible hours in the Nursery. As a result of their positive start in Nursery, nearly all children who enter Reception are already familiar with the school and settle quickly and well. Their starting points are mostly typical for their age. Children make good progress through the early years and the proportion of children who demonstrate a good level of development by the end of Reception remains consistently above that found nationally.

Pupils are very polite and articulate. They have an obvious pride in their school and speak openly about the values that you promote. They are eager to speak about their learning activities and about how much they appreciate the swimming pool on your school site. Pupils have much to occupy them at lunchtimes and less structured times. Friendships and play are highly evident, and pupils demonstrate that they feel safe.

Parents are positive about the work of the school. From the many comments received during the inspection, one comment typified the sentiment of many: 'Laburnum Lower school is well managed where children are given not only a great foundation in education, but are nurtured and provided with great values.'

The mark of your decisive leadership is how well you and other leaders keep improving the provision and set precise goals for the school to achieve. Your improvement plans accurately identify that you want pupils to excel even further, particularly those who are most able.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders, including governors, place the highest priority on keeping pupils safe and providing strong pastoral care for pupils at Laburnum Lower School. Leaders have been successful in creating a secure and caring environment in which pupils and staff have confidence and feel valued. All parents who responded to the online

questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their children are happy and well looked after. One parental comment stated, 'I am confident that my child is safe and happy.'

The school's safeguarding policies and procedures meet current requirements. Suitable recording systems are in place for the recruitment of staff. Governors regularly check that the necessary recruitment checks on adults working at the school have been carried out effectively.

Leaders ensure that staff are well informed and trained about safeguarding guidance, including the government's 'Prevent' duty to counter radicalisation. Staff receive regular training, both formally and through regular staff updates, and are suitably qualified and confident to implement the school's policies. Staff ensure that risk assessments are thorough, when taking pupils on school trips or using the swimming pool.

Pupils who spoke with me during the inspection said that they feel safe and have someone to talk to if they are concerned. Pupils also told me that they are very confident that staff will deal well with conflict or any potential bullying situations should they ever arise.

### **Inspection findings**

- My first line of enquiry was to consider the provision in mathematics and writing for the most able pupils. This was because, in 2016, at key stage 1 the proportion of pupils who reached the higher standard in both subjects was below the national average. In mathematics, this was in the lowest 10%.
- This academic year, you have made this issue a priority for your school improvement planning. Your English and mathematics leaders have an accurate understanding of the good quality of teaching over time in key stage 1. They use the school's own data information effectively, so that individuals who are in danger of falling behind receive precise support and help. Consequently, this year, the proportion of pupils who are reaching the higher standard in writing is improving.
- In mathematics, pupils develop a strong sense of the basic skills and strategies in addition, subtraction, division and multiplication. Although typically pupils make good progress from their starting points at key stage 1, your leaders recognise that there is still more to do. You have identified that the most able pupils still require greater opportunities to apply their mathematical skills so they can deepen their understanding further.
- My second line of enquiry was to consider whether pupils continue to make good progress in Years 3 and 4, so they are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Work in pupils' books shows that they have opportunity to write at length to practise their skills, often editing and redrafting their work so it improves. In reading, pupils develop their skills of comprehension and their love of reading through precisely planned activities. This is because, this year, you have focused

on developing their interest in, and passion for, reading. The impact of this work can be seen in other subjects across the curriculum.

- Pupils in Year 4 work diligently and well. They listen to instructions carefully and respond quickly and with enthusiasm for their work. Additional adults are used well to support pupils who require further questioning so they can focus and achieve the task that has been set.
- Pupils were keen to talk with me about how they are very motivated to learn their times tables because of the exciting ways that adults present their learning. Consequently, pupils in Year 4 demonstrate a very strong understanding of this crucial mathematical skill.
- Pupils spoken with are proud of their school and of their own achievements. However, you still recognise that the curriculum for mathematics requires further development as the school moves to become a primary school. Pupils have the capabilities to deepen their skills further, so that even more can reach the required standard and above by the time they reach Year 6.
- Another area I considered during the inspection was the progress that children make in early years. This was because, in the previous inspection report, you were asked to improve the lesson planning for Nursery and Reception, including outdoors and inside learning.
- As the school is built in a conservation area, you are unable to install an outdoor canopy to ensure continuous access to an outside classroom. This is a challenge for you. Nevertheless, adults plan effectively and cater for all areas of learning, both inside and outside, so that children have as many opportunities as possible to develop their skills. The proportion of children who leave Reception reaching a good level of development continues to be above the national average. This represents good progress from their broadly typical starting points.
- Although children achieve well in Reception, the proportion who reach the required level of development in writing is less consistent. In 2016, this was the first year in three years when children's achievement in writing reached the national average. You recognise that, for some children, the quality of teaching in handwriting and letter formation is not precise enough. Boys particularly are not grasping the basics swiftly enough, and adults do not routinely reinforce these essential skills. Consequently, the quality of writing is not as effective as it should be for their age and capabilities.
- An area that appeared as a strength from your published data information is the achievement and progress of pupils who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs. I considered this as a line of enquiry.
- You clearly and effectively identify the barriers to learning for the vulnerable pupils in your school. Your deputy headteacher who leads this aspect of your school's work has a strong understanding of the strengths and of where to improve even further. Together with strong leadership of the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, you ensure that pupils' emotional and academic needs are precisely met.
- Families are practically and skilfully supported so that these pupils receive the care and intervention they require. Pupils who have special educational needs

and/or disabilities and who are disadvantaged make at least expected but often exceptional progress in their learning. Where possible, the most able disadvantaged pupils are provided with precisely targeted support so they can reach above average progress for their age.

- In 2016, the school's attendance overall was lower than the national average. For a few pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, attendance was lower and in the bottom 10% nationally. This situation has been similar for a number of years, often due to individual pupils' complex needs.
- All school staff make sure that they encourage attendance and combat persistent absenteeism. Through a range of challenge and support, you work with parents to increase attendance for individuals who fall below national expectations or for whom there are other additional social or medical reasons. You work closely with the education welfare officer, which is proving highly effective in helping families in often complex circumstances. Consequently, attendance overall is rapidly improving, and this year is currently just above the national average.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they increase the proportion of pupils who reach the higher standard in writing and mathematics so it is at least in line with national averages in key stage 1
- children, in particular boys, in early years develop appropriate letter formation and practise their handwriting, so they can make even better progress in writing
- they continue to develop the curriculum for mathematics so that pupils have more opportunities to use, apply and master their skills in key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, the coordinator for special educational needs and/or disabilities, the leaders for mathematics and English, the school office personnel, and four representatives of the governing body. I gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included observations of teaching and learning in every class, jointly with you. I evaluated pupils' current work across all subjects and a wide range of abilities. I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including

your self-evaluation, the school's plans for continued improvement, a sample of assessment information, governors' minutes of meetings and documents relating to attendance.

I spoke informally with pupils during lessons and at lunchtime to consider their views. Policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils were examined, including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff and case studies about referrals made to external agencies. A discussion was held with you as the designated safeguarding lead.

I took account of the 49 parent responses that were provided during the inspection time to the online survey, Parent View, and 49 freetext comments. The views of staff were considered from 17 responses to the staff online questionnaire.