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15 November 2017

Mrs Gill Morris  
Chief Executive Officer  
Northwood Park Primary School  
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West Midlands  
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Dear Mrs Morris

### **Short inspection of Northwood Park Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 1 November 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 predecessor school was judged to be good in September 2011.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Northwood Park Primary is an inclusive and cohesive school which clearly reflects the school's motto, 'To always treat others as you would like them to treat you.' You and your skilful staff team foster and promote a vibrant and positive learning community. As a result, pupils are enthusiastic and very well-behaved learners. I could see very clearly how committed you and your staff are to pupils and their families. Leaders and staff value pupils' work and efforts and motivate them to succeed and enjoy their education. The large majority of parents and carers agree, rightly, that this is a good school with some outstanding features.

Leaders, governors and the Northwood Park Educational Trust provide strong, effective leadership and oversight of the school's work. You and senior leaders successfully monitor, train and support staff to maintain effective teaching and support for pupils across the school. Teachers and support staff provide a stimulating, creative curriculum which enlivens and interests pupils. Work in pupils' books, displays of their best work and assessments show that there is mainly good teaching with some outstanding practice that is raising standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Your ambitious and high expectations encourage leaders and staff to strive continually for improvement. Since the previous inspection, senior staff and governors have worked hard with staff to provide pupils with stimulating

opportunities to experience, learn and develop a range of skills and knowledge in all subjects of the national curriculum. The school's curriculum is a real strength and includes a very broad range of school and off-site activities and experiences that include sport, musical ensembles and the creative and performing arts. The curriculum and welfare provided for pupils are having an outstanding impact on their behaviour and personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

There have been significant changes to the school since its previous inspection in 2011. The school has grown in size, reflecting its increasing popularity and reputation within and beyond its local community. In addition to converting to become an academy in 2015, significant staff changes and the intelligent recruitment of strong leaders and staff have laid secure foundations for sustained improvement to pupils' outcomes and teaching.

There has been good improvement to the early years provision, which was judged to have some relative weaknesses at the time of the previous inspection. The most recent early years assessments for children currently in Year 1 show that they made rapid progress in relation to low starting points in Reception last year. The assessments were also a significant improvement on the previous year's results. This now needs to be sustained as there are occasions when children are not being challenged enough so they switch off and this slows learning. You and the staff responsible for this phase of the school ensure that provision for the youngest children includes stimulating and varied indoor and outdoor activities. During this inspection, and early in the school year, I could see that Reception children were, for most of the time, engaged in their learning and play activities.

Similarly, the school has improved teaching and learning in key stage 1, as this was also a relative weakness the last time the school was inspected. The transition from the early years into Year 1 is now effective. The most recent phonics screening check results show that early literacy is being taught well. The large majority of Year 1 pupils reached the expected standard in the national phonics screening check in 2017, which was a significant improvement on the previous year. In addition, the teaching in Years 1 and 2 is increasingly improving standards. The proportion of pupils reaching or exceeding age-related standards in reading, writing and mathematics is rising very well. However, in both the early years and in key stage 1, there is still scope to consolidate these achievements and sustain improvement. Although there is typically good and some highly effective teaching in these phases of the school, some pupils could still be challenged more. Early writing is being taught well. However, the school has rightly identified that the form and structure of pupils' handwriting could still be better and more consistent across classes. Furthermore, the current focus on improving learning in mathematics across the school is also bearing fruit. Consequently, results show an increase in the proportion of pupils reaching and exceeding age-related standards.

The teaching in key stage 2 also has significant strengths which are having a bearing on pupils' learning and assessment outcomes in Years 3 to 6. Disadvantaged pupils are achieving as well as others who are not disadvantaged

across the school and nationally. The head of school manages assessment information very well to identify gaps between the achievement of different groups and individuals. You and your senior and middle leaders in each phase of the school are good at using these assessments to plan and provide appropriate and timely support to help pupils catch up if they fall behind. Again, the focus on mathematics needs to continue throughout key stage 2, so that more of the most able pupils reach the higher standards and learn in greater depth.

Throughout the school, there is a good balance of support and intervention for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Similarly, the strongest teaching, including some that we observed together with senior leaders during the inspection, provides the most able pupils with mathematics work that is challenging. However, as we discussed and I determined throughout this short inspection, there is still scope to focus on teachers' ongoing assessments of pupils' learning during lessons. Some of the challenge tasks provided in mathematics lessons help pupils to think harder, but they are not routinely prepared for the tasks because of gaps and misunderstandings that slow their progress. For example, pupils tried to tackle more complex calculation tasks in some classes but did not have the necessary mental arithmetic skills to cope. I observed examples of pupils in key stage 2 using clumsy methods to add and subtract. I pointed these out to senior leaders during our joint observations. It is important now to focus on these mathematical challenge tasks so that they are appropriately matched to pupils' needs and abilities. In addition, teachers need to check for misunderstandings, or take pupils back to previous learning so they can address these during lessons before moving on to harder tasks.

You, your leaders, staff and governors have transformed the school as it has grown in size. You have all maintained an enriching and creative curriculum. What was particularly impressive was the way teachers incorporate interesting writing tasks with classic and modern children's literature. You were keen to point out to me the work done in some key stage 2 classes when pupils wrote reviews of books about their favourite authors. Your personal commitment and that of your head of school and staff is clearly reflected in 'the extra mile' you all go to make sure, for example, that many pupils learn to play a musical instrument. It is impressive that you have a wonderfully talented school orchestra. Please pass on my congratulations as well to the pupils in Year 5 who we briefly observed rehearsing their singing for their eagerly anticipated class assembly. The quality of tone and enthusiasm with which they sang was remarkably inspiring. Well done. I could also see how much investment you and the governors put into helping pupils experience two- and three-dimensional fine art and sculpture. The work with various artists in residence is clearly displayed around the school and pupils' work is of a very high standard.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose and robust. Staff vetting and checking systems are rigorous and up to date. Leaders, governors and administrators carry out regular reviews of the school's procedures and there is a vigilant culture of safeguarding across the school. There are effective security and checking-in

systems for visitors and staff to make sure that pupils are safe and secure. Pupils are made aware of the risks associated with electronic social media or the internet. Specific lessons about e-safety, such as the one we observed briefly during the inspection, are taught very well. The pupils I spoke with were fully aware of the precautions they need to take when using computers and electronic devices. Nearly all the parents I spoke to and the vast majority responding to the online questionnaire, Parent View, are correct in agreeing that pupils are safe in school and are very well cared for by the staff.

## **Inspection findings**

- Your leadership and that of the head of school and senior leaders is strong and ambitious. Through very effective recruitment, training and professional development the school has a cohesive team of teaching and support staff. Staff morale is high and this is reflected in the responses from staff to the inspection survey. Many pupils too responded to an online questionnaire and confirm that they enjoy school very much. One of the pupils I spoke with summed it up perfectly on behalf of the group I met, 'I love coming to school because you learn lots and it is easy to make and keep friends.'
- The head of school works closely with middle leaders and teachers to oversee assessment information about pupils' progress and performance. You and the associate headteacher, together with the local governing board, are provided with accurate analyses of pupils' work in books and assessments of their progress over time. Teachers have a clear overview of pupils' attainment which helps them identify pupils who are at risk of falling behind. Some accurate self-evaluations about teaching and learning are informed by these assessments. There is still work to be done to ensure that teachers offer the right level of challenge for the most able pupils.
- In the early years, teachers and support staff encourage children to talk, role play and experiment with practical resources to improve their language and mathematics. Some of the teaching could be sharper as children sometimes lose interest if the pace of learning is too slow. The teaching of early literacy and phonics is effective in both the early years and key stage 1, although past assessments show variable outcomes. For example, in 2016, the proportion of Year 1 pupils reaching the expected standard in phonics was below the national average. In addition, the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and others who are not disadvantaged was too wide in phonics last year. The most recent unvalidated results show significant improvement and gaps have also closed between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and others. This now needs to be sustained in both the early years and Year 1.
- The teaching in key stage 1 is much improved compared with the time of the previous inspection. The most recent outcomes from teachers' provisional national assessments bear this out. In 2016, assessments showed some significant weaknesses, especially as too few of the most able pupils exceeded age-related standards in writing. Some strong and consistently effective teaching and support throughout key stage 1 are now turning things around and assessments across all classes show significant improvement to standards and

the pace of learning over time.

- Leaders and governors have accurately identified the next steps for improvement with a focus on handwriting and mathematics. There is accurate self-evaluation and systematic monitoring by senior and middle leaders. This enables you and the governing body to build up a reasonable and accurate assessment of the quality of teaching and learning.
- Good use is made of outdoor areas, such as woodlands, gardens and the 'farm', where pupils care for chicks and chickens. I could see that teachers are very skilled at using the information technology room. The sensory room for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is a stimulating resource, particularly for pupils who have autism or emotional and behavioural needs. These are just a few examples confirming how well your staff are committed to the welfare and well-being of pupils, whatever their needs and capabilities.
- Fine art and sculptures made by pupils with visiting artists adorn many walls and corridors. I can see why pupils are very proud of their school and why so many told me they love coming to school. All the pupils I spoke with conducted themselves extremely well and I could see how proudly they wear their uniform. Playground pals, monitors, librarians and house captains perform their duties with pride; as one put it, 'I am very privileged to do this, and so I'll try my best.' The school council is also very well organised so that pupils really do have a voice throughout the school. The head girl and treasurer were very clear when they told me, 'We are planning to do more for our environment as well as focus on road safety at the moment.'
- Classic and modern children's literature are studied and include a wide range of authors. Books play a very important part in promoting and developing pupils' love of reading. There is a real thirst for reading that is being promoted well and accounts for pupils' good achievement.
- The curriculum and pastoral support provided for pupils make an outstanding contribution to their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. Pupils told me how much they enjoy their annual residential visit and the opportunities they have to perform on stage, such as the musical 'Oliver'. I was very impressed by the range of musical performances that the school orchestra and choir participate in, including some national events with other schools.
- I know from the discussions I had with senior staff and governors during the inspection that you are all striving towards becoming an outstanding school. This inspection confirms that there are now secure foundations to help realise this aim. The curriculum forms a strong basis for this improvement, so the focus now should be on sustaining the most recent improvements to standards and ensuring that teachers provide the right level of challenge to the most capable pupils.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- Continue focusing on improving teaching and pupils' achievement in mathematics to sustain the current improvements to standards by:

- making sure that teachers check and assess what pupils know and understand to make sure there are no gaps or misunderstandings before moving their learning on
  - providing the right level of challenge for the most able pupils in lessons to help them reach their expected learning targets.
- Sustain the current improvements to pupils' achievement in the early years and key stage 1 by:
- building on the good progress pupils make in early literacy and phonics to ensure that more pupils reach or exceed age-related standards in both reading and writing by the end of Years 1 and 2
  - making sure that all the children capable of reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception consistently reach their full potential and reach these goals.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing board, the regional schools commissioner, the director of Northwood Park Educational Trust and the director of children's services for Wolverhampton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, the head of school, the associate headteacher, the chief operating officer and the acting deputy head of school. I also met with members of the local governing board, some of whom are also directors or trustees of the Northwood Park Educational Trust. I reviewed and discussed with you and senior staff the school's self-evaluation and the school development and improvement plan. We visited classes with senior leaders to observe teaching and learning, spoke to pupils during lessons and looked at some of their work in books. I also spoke to pupils during lunchtime and met a group in the afternoon to discuss their views about the school and their work and progress, as well as how safe they feel. I spoke to some parents at the start of the school day and considered the 41 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. I analysed 29 responses from staff and 40 responses from pupils to Ofsted's online questionnaire, which was available for completion during the inspection. I considered and checked some of the school's assessment information with the head of school and associate headteacher, as well as analysing previous and most recent provisional national tests results for 2017. I checked safeguarding and staff vetting procedures with the business manager.