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Mr Brian Simber  
Acting Headteacher  
Willow Bank Primary School  
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London  
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Dear Mr Simber

### **Short inspection of Willow Bank Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 5 December 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 February 2013.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The number of pupils has increased and, in 2016, the school had its first published results for Year 6 pupils. Although the results for this group were disappointing, a thorough review of provision has taken place to ensure that all pupils are now making good progress. Since your appointment in 2016, you have set high expectations for your team, tightened the school's organisation, and improved procedures for monitoring pupils' progress. The senior team has worked successfully to embed a culture of achievement and quality teaching across the school. Good support from the Trust has helped bring greater consistency in the quality of teaching. Carefully targeted interventions have made sure that pupils at risk of falling behind are well supported. Additional adults supporting pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well trained. They know their pupils' needs well and provide good support. This has all combined to bring about significant improvement in pupils' attainment, with accelerated progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion of pupils reaching expectations in national tests for Year 6 in 2017 was above average. Pupils across the school, including those who are disadvantaged, are now making good progress.

You ensure that, along with senior leaders and governors, the school's accurate and detailed self-evaluation and improvement plans are implemented and monitored well. This helps everyone understand the priorities, and makes sure that the impact of actions are evaluated successfully. You have ensured very effective professional development and guidance for new teachers that successfully builds their confidence

and consistency in the quality of teaching. The focus on improving pupils' writing is leading to improved quality and depth in writing across the school. Some teachers successfully encourage pupils to extend their writing into other subjects. However, this is inconsistent across the school and is an area leaders know still needs further work. The overall capacity to continue improvements in teaching and in the curriculum is growing. A very positive culture of improvement is evident across the school.

Governors know the school well and value your drive and vision for improvement. They fulfil their statutory duties and provide strong support, recognising the positive changes that have been introduced, and the impact they have made.

The school is a very calm and orderly community where pupils are both motivated and eager to learn. Pupils work hard in lessons and value and care for each other. They have a good understanding of the rules and expectations of their teachers and respond very well. When given opportunities to work independently and show responsibility, pupils rise to the challenge with enthusiasm. They appreciate and value the contributions of other pupils in lessons and the support they receive from teachers and the additional adults working with them. They look out for others to make sure that they are safe, have friends, and they take responsibility for mentoring and supporting new pupils.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding arrangements are thorough. New staff and volunteers working at the school are rigorously vetted. Governors regularly check the school's safeguarding records and an annual safeguarding audit is undertaken by the Trust. All staff have had appropriate and recent training. Staff take safeguarding seriously, are vigilant, and know what to do if they have concerns. Any concerns are reported swiftly and referred to external agencies as appropriate.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe. They have a good understanding of e-safety and which websites they can, and cannot, use. Pupils have a good knowledge of how they can protect themselves by not publishing photographs in school uniform or giving their name and address to people online. Behaviour is good and pupils play safely. Pupils keep a watchful eye on those who may be upset or unhappy. If they felt the need to report someone for not being kind, they are confident that their concerns would be taken seriously. All this contributes to an effective culture of safeguarding in which pupils are safe and staff are vigilant.

### **Inspection findings**

- My first focus for the inspection was to review how effective leaders are in ensuring that all pupils make good progress in reading and achieve well. While national assessments in 2017 indicated that pupils' progress in reading was similar to other schools, progress in writing was much stronger.
- Leaders have put effective systems in place to improve the focus on reading and to help pupils develop their reading skills, and their interest in wanting to read. Good resources have been purchased and pupils have many opportunities to read.

Reading volunteers support the school and provide additional and regular support to those pupils who need an extra boost. Additional interventions for those pupils who need extra support are implemented very well. Additional adults are well trained and know their pupils well, adapting the intervention and support according to their individual needs. This is successful. Pupils are encouraged to read regularly and to read at home. Teachers have good subject knowledge in the teaching of reading. Phonics is taught well and teachers encourage pupils to read for meaning, using a range of skills to check vocabulary and to make sure they understand.

- Pupils read well and show very good attitudes to reading. Most read fluently and confidently apply their knowledge of phonics to read unfamiliar words. They use dictionaries and thesauruses very well in lessons. They confidently read for information across subjects and many older pupils are reading with expression. Pupils talk confidently about the books they read, and can summarise the key points. Teachers' own assessments alongside the school's careful tracking of achievement confirm that all pupils are making good progress in their reading.
- Another focus was to understand how effectively leaders are ensuring that disadvantaged pupils are making good progress and closing the achievement gap with other pupils in the school. Although progress made by disadvantaged pupils was below average through key stage 2 in 2016, results of national tests for Year 6 pupils in 2017 showed significant improvement. We agreed to look at whether this progress is reflected across all year groups and classes.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils is a key priority for leaders and governors. Leaders monitor the progress disadvantaged pupils make very closely. They use regular opportunities to discuss pupils' progress with every teacher and to make sure that any pupil at risk of falling behind is identified early. They work with teachers to make sure that a planned programme of support is implemented, and that it is kept under regular review. This makes sure that the progress made by individual disadvantaged pupils is constantly monitored. It helps teachers and leaders respond quickly where they need to take action, for example where attendance is affecting progress. Teachers deploy their additional adults effectively in lessons. Additional interventions are implemented with individual pupils being invited to attend. They are supported with work that is carefully planned to fill any gaps in knowledge and to maintain a good pace of learning. Class by class, and term by term, the progress made by disadvantaged pupils in reading, writing and mathematics is analysed carefully. Governors take a keen interest in evaluating the impact of additional funding provided to support disadvantaged pupils. They ensure that the funding is spent well. School assessment shows consistently good progress over time.
- Finally, we agreed to focus on how well pupils are developing a breadth of knowledge and deeper understanding across all subjects to ensure that they achieve well. Information on the curriculum is provided through the school's website but some of this information lacks clarity, and there are some contradictions. It provides limited information on how the school ensures good progress in learning across subjects.
- Following the poor English and mathematics national test results in 2016, leaders embarked upon a rigorous and much needed review of teaching and learning in

reading, writing and mathematics. This also included tighter use of assessment, and additional interventions for those pupils needing greater support to improve progress. This had to be done to ensure that progress in English and mathematics was consistently good for all pupils, and that gaps were tackled swiftly. Additional time was given to the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics in some classes to boost achievement. This reduced the time provided in some classes for pupils to develop breadth and depth across some other subjects. It narrowed the curriculum for some pupils and led to some inconsistencies in the range and progression of learning across subjects through the school. Pupils recognise that their experience in some subjects is limited at times.

- Leaders and the Trust have begun to address these inconsistencies successfully and to review the curriculum to make sure that pupils have a broad and rich curriculum with sufficient time to develop the depth they need to achieve well. Good provision is in place for music and physical education, with pupils developing a good understanding, and the skills they need to achieve well. Science is planned well and provides for good progression in learning, particularly in scientific investigation. Some teachers make good connections between history, geography and religious education with English lessons, promoting many opportunities for pupils to reinforce their reading and writing skills. This is working well, but is inconsistent across classes. Art, design technology and French have suffered most from the narrowing of the curriculum in some classes, but the focus upon strengthening the curriculum is beginning to address the imbalance. Good opportunities are created for pupils to use the outdoor environment to support and enrich the curriculum. Bees, chickens, guinea pigs and rabbits are kept in the school grounds and pupils learn to look after them and better understand environmental science. However, leaders know that there is more to be done to strengthen this work.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the curriculum is broad and balanced so that all pupils can build on prior learning and develop the deep knowledge and understanding they need to achieve well across all subjects
- opportunities for pupils to reinforce and apply their literacy skills across subjects are consistently applied across all classes.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bexley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Wagstaff  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

I had discussions with the acting headteacher and governors about actions they had put in place to improve the school. I spoke with the chief executive of Woodland Academy Trust. Senior leaders were interviewed about their role in supporting teachers to bring about improved learning for pupils. 'Learning walks' took place with the acting headteacher across classes in key stage 2 during the inspection. Samples of pupils' work were reviewed and I spoke with a group of pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6. I listened to pupils read in Years 4, 5 and 6, and analysed a range of school documents linked to the school self-evaluation and improvement priorities. The 25 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were reviewed, as were the 36 responses to the staff questionnaire, and the eight responses to the pupil questionnaire.