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Mr Tom Hinkley  
Interim Headteacher  
Woodthorne Primary School  
Woodthorne Road South  
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West Midlands  
WV6 8XL

Dear Mr Hinkley

### **Short inspection of Woodthorne Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 2018, 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 2014.

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

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

Academic standards in reading, writing and mathematics have remained above average. Pupils say that they are happy, feel safe and are proud of their school. They also say that the school helps them to make the most of their abilities and to develop responsible attitudes.

Several aspects of the school have been strengthened. Phonics teaching, which was identified as an area for improvement by the previous inspection, has gone from strength to strength and the early years provision has improved. Since the previous inspection, the school has also been through some leadership changes. You and the governors are now navigating a further period of change, as the school moves towards joining a local multi-academy trust. You believe that this next phase in the school's life will help to support further improvement and bring another level of challenge and support to the school's work.

You are aware that, while academic standards have been maintained and there is some strong teaching, there is scope for further improvement. In some classes, for instance, assessment could be better. You also know that the transition arrangements from the early years to key stage 1 could be smoother. In addition, some staff do not consistently apply the school's behaviour policy, and a few pupils miss too much school. You have all these matters in hand.

In summary, you have a well-informed understanding of the school's work and performance and realistic, ambitious plans for the future.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

You are the main lead for safeguarding and ensure that appropriate cover is in place if you are absent. All staff know what to do when safety concerns arise and are kept up to date through weekly updates and training days with other schools. Governors are also well informed and pupils know how to stay safe in different situations. During my conversation with pupils, they told me that school leaders treat them with calm respect, but are also firm when necessary. They went on to say that, just occasionally, some staff can be too strict for no obvious reason.

All the correct checks on staff and visitors are carried out and records are kept up to date and stored securely. The school's single central record is complete. Any safeguarding concerns that have arisen in the recent past have been dealt with correctly.

Pupils get on well with one another and say that bullying is rare.

### **Inspection findings**

- In recent times, there have been several changes to the school's senior leadership. In addition, several governors have left and new governors have been appointed. Throughout this time, good academic standards have been maintained, although the school's plans to drive standards even higher have been delayed.
- In order to provide a more sustainable and effective leadership structure, you and the governors have put plans in place to join a local multi-academy trust. You and the governors have researched this decision carefully. You believe that joining formally with other schools will allow leaders and staff to share training and expertise, provide an additional level of challenge and support and, ultimately, bring significant benefits to the pupils at the school. During this inspection, I met with several leaders who were involved in shaping this decision and also talked with some parents about the planned changes. While parents expressed some mixed views, it is clear that you have taken advice and have followed proper processes. Currently, there is a confident and optimistic outlook in the school.
- You and other leaders have an informed understanding of the school's effectiveness. You know that recent changes in senior leadership have interfered with the school's programme of feedback and training for staff. Even so, there is some very strong teaching in the school. In Year 6 mathematics, for example, pupils have excellent attitudes to learning and are able to discuss their work with insight and confidence. This is because teaching builds very well on earlier

learning and is pitched just right for pupils' different needs. Elsewhere, in Year 4 for instance, teaching is lively, imaginative and brings out the best in pupils.

- However, some teaching is not so effective. In some cases, teachers carry on with planned activities even when some pupils do not understand and cannot keep up. You acknowledge that teachers' use of assessment does vary across the school and have plans in place to improve this. It is also worth noting that, overall, teaching assistants make a good contribution to pupils' learning but practice does vary from one class to another. Occasionally, teaching assistants carry out noisy tasks at inappropriate times, which distracts other pupils from learning, and this is not picked up by teachers or leaders. In a few instances, teaching assistants do not apply the school's approach to behaviour management. This leads to some unnecessarily sharp comments that do not help to get the best from pupils.
- The move from the early years classes to key stage 1 comes as a shock to some pupils because there is quite a stark contrast in classroom routines. In the Nursery and Reception classes, children settle in quickly and respond well to the nurturing approach. Classrooms are well resourced and children are kept safe and occupied by purposeful activities, which they enjoy. In Year 1, teaching is informed and effective and pupils continue to make progress, but there is clearly quite a significant change in approach. Some pupils thrive on this, but some find it overwhelming. You and your staff are aware of this and are exploring ways to smooth the transition from one class to the next.
- Phonics teaching is strong. Since the previous inspection, which recommended improvements to phonics teaching, some considerable changes for the better have been made. Staff have received training, resources have been increased and teaching sessions are brisk, consistent and effective. Consequently, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard for their age in the Year 1 phonics check has risen year on year and, in 2017, was well above the national figure.
- Pupils' progress in reading presents a positive picture. Pupils read confidently in class and share their enjoyment with others. During this inspection, pupils talked enthusiastically about their favourite authors and the books they had read at home and in school. It is clear that there is a healthy reading culture in the school.
- Most pupils attend regularly and on time and, since the last inspection, overall attendance levels have risen. However, you have concerns about the persistent absence of a particular group of pupils, which has not improved. You, together with an education welfare officer, are taking appropriate action in response. You take time to build constructive relationships with parents. You have reminded parents about the importance of regular school attendance and put formal support in place, when necessary. You view improving the attendance of these pupils as a key priority at this time.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to work to improve the overall quality of teaching by sharing and learning from effective practice within and beyond the school
- teachers' use of assessment is sharpened up in some classes, so that lessons are pitched at the right level for pupils' learning needs
- all staff apply the school's behaviour policy with consistency
- they work with parents to improve the attendance of pupils who miss too much school.

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

Yours sincerely

Diane Pye  
**Ofsted Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, senior leaders, staff and governors. I also met with the chief executive officer and other staff from Perry Hall multi-academy trust and a representative from the local authority. I carried out short observations of teaching and looked at pupils' work in books and on display. I talked with pupils in lessons and at breaktime and met with a group of pupils to gather their views. I spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day.

By the end of the inspection, there were 49 recent responses on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I took account of these responses and talked with some parents during the inspection.

I looked at several documents, including: pupils' progress information; the school's own evaluation of its performance; development plans, external monitoring reports, a range of school records; and several school policy documents. I also checked the school's website and the procedures for keeping pupils safe. I asked members of staff, pupils and parents about safeguarding matters.