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Mr Mark Welch
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Welch

Short inspection of Warden Hill Junior 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 March 2014.

The school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your governors have successfully managed an expansion to pupil numbers, including a new building, and yet maintained the warm and purposeful atmosphere commented upon in the previous inspection report. Every pupil is still known as an individual – not only by their class teacher but also by you and your senior team. You and your senior leaders have created an ethos of high expectations of both behaviour and academic achievement. This allows teachers and pupils to work in a well-ordered and calm environment because any poor behaviour is challenged robustly and never accepted as a reason for a pupil to underachieve. Teachers are consistent in the way they manage the behaviour of pupils and work hard to provide them with varied and engaging activities which capture their interest and stimulate their desire to learn.

Following the previous inspection, you reviewed your approach to teaching writing and this has led to a steady rise in outcomes for your pupils by the end of key stage 2. You have developed a clear philosophy that pupils write best from experience. Your teachers' efforts to provide pupils with activities that stimulate their imaginations have contributed significantly to the improvements in writing outcomes. Pupils say that they enjoy the diversity of topics they are given to write about. A wide variety of writing is celebrated not only in pupils' books but in vibrant displays across the school. In the 2017 end of key stage 2 tests, outcomes for all groups of pupils in writing were above average.

Results in mathematics are also rising so that the progress pupils make, and their

attainment by the time they leave at the end of Year 6, is in line with other schools nationally. Disappointing outcomes in reading in the 2017 tests have led to a review of how reading is taught. Work in pupils' books supports information provided by the school that, in all year groups, progress in reading is improving. The proportion of pupils at Warden Hill Junior School who achieve the expected standard and the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined is broadly in line with national expectations.

Although outcomes in writing and mathematics are stronger than in reading, reading does have a high profile in the school and pupils are exposed to a wide variety of reading material during lessons. Opportunities to read aloud to an adult have been increased, with a focus on reading for understanding as well as fluency. Pupils who read to me during my visit did so with confidence and expression.

Pupils at Warden Hill are welcoming to visitors and happy to talk about their school and their learning. They told me that they enjoy coming to school, like their teachers and are keen to do well in lessons. Pupils celebrate their cultural diversity in many ways, which include participating in events such as Black History Month. Pupils also develop a sound understanding of values such as democracy and tolerance. They stand for election to the student council, take on responsibilities as prefects and debate their views on what it means to be a useful citizen in modern Britain.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and other leaders ensure that all staff are well trained so that they carry out their safeguarding duties diligently. Staff understand their responsibilities and know what to do if they have any concerns. Pupils who spoke to me during the inspection all said that they feel safe and parents overwhelmingly agree that their children are kept safe in the school. Pupils have a clear understanding of what bullying is and report that very little bullying happens in school. They could all name at least one adult they would be comfortable talking to in school if they had any worries and were confident that their teachers would do all they could to help them.

Your governors actively fulfil their statutory duty to ensure that pupils are safe in school, which includes checks that are carried out on new staff. Governors also share their expertise in areas such as internet safety to make sure that pupils are educated effectively about how to keep themselves safe.

Inspection findings

- To determine whether the school remained good, one of my main lines of enquiry was to explore the school's response to the dip in reading outcomes for Year 6 pupils in 2017. This dip was unexpected and went against an historic trend of attainment where reading has been broadly in line with other schools nationally. Your team's response was rapid, and you have reviewed fully your approach to teaching reading across all year groups. Close analysis of test results revealed, for example, that pupils' skills in retrieving key details from texts and

understanding more subtle meanings needed more development. Teachers have received training in these areas and you have raised the level of expectation across all year groups so that pupils become more secure in their reading skills before they reach Year 6.

- However, although more opportunities are in place in lessons for pupils to develop their understanding of what they read, not all teachers have high enough expectations of how pupils respond to questioning. For example, pupils are not routinely expected to write responses to questions using full sentences. In class, when pupils answer orally, teachers accept incomplete answers and, at times, finish the more in-depth explanation for them. Because of this, pupils do not get enough practice at developing their thinking fully or at showing the depth of reasoning that will help to accelerate their progress, especially in reading.
- I also looked carefully at how well you are meeting the needs of disadvantaged pupils at Warden Hill Junior School. In 2017, disadvantaged pupils made more progress in their writing than other pupils nationally, so that their attainment in this area rose to be in line with disadvantaged pupils in other schools. There was also an improvement in the progress of disadvantaged pupils in mathematics, although their attainment still lags behind that of other pupils. A smaller proportion of disadvantaged pupils still reach the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2 than seen in other pupils nationally. However, apart from in reading, differences in the progress and attainment of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils at Warden Hill are diminishing.
- I also discussed with you how well teaching meets the needs of your most-able pupils as well as those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. The previous inspection highlighted the need for teachers to plan activities that provided the right level of challenge for these groups of pupils. Although your most-able pupils did not make as much progress in 2017 as those of middle ability, work in pupils' books shows that teachers are increasingly adapting tasks to suit a variety of needs in the classroom. In a Year 6 mathematics lesson, for example, the most able pupils were relishing their teacher's challenge to work out a set of x- and y-coordinates using the minimum of information needed to do so. They were able to work together and apply the knowledge they had to help them solve the problem. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are well catered for and make good progress from their individual starting points.
- Another area I investigated was the breadth of the curriculum available to your pupils. The rich and varied diet of topics, enrichment activities and extra-curricular opportunities meets the needs of your pupils very well. One of the reasons that standards in writing have risen is because pupils have opportunities to write at length across a variety of subjects. You have now introduced similar opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills to real situations. For example, Year 3 pupils walk and measure a mile in physical education; Year 5 pupils work out what their ration allowance would cover in history; and in science Year 4 pupils calculate how much the electricity they use costs. Pupils develop an understanding of how reading, writing and mathematics are useful to them in subjects across the curriculum as well as in life beyond school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- progress in reading and mathematics accelerates for all groups of pupils, but especially disadvantaged pupils and the most able, so that outcomes rise to match those in writing
- pupils continue to develop confidence in reading and understanding high-quality texts
- extended opportunities are provided for all pupils to apply mathematical skills across the curriculum
- teachers expect all pupils to use full sentences and to give full responses when answering questions and speaking in front of the class to show greater depth in their understanding of the texts they read.

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

Yours sincerely

Lesley Daniel
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your senior leadership team, the chair of the governing body as well as two other governors and a group of Year 6 pupils.

I visited classes with you where I observed pupils learning and talked to them about their work and their school. In lessons, we looked at pupils' work in books to determine the quality of learning over time and the quality of learning across the curriculum.

I spent time speaking informally with pupils in class, before school and at breaktime. I considered the 39 responses to Parent View, which included free-text comments, and to the 27 completed staff questionnaires.

I scrutinised the school's documents about safeguarding, including the record of checks on the suitability of each member of staff to work with children and young people, the school's own evaluation of its performance and your plans for its improvement.