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Mr Jeremy Pentreath and Mr Phillip Palmer  
Headteachers  
The Oaks Primary School  
Aster Road  
Ipswich  
Suffolk  
IP2 0NR

Dear Mr Pentreath and Mr Palmer

### **Short inspection of The Oaks 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 September 2012.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

At the previous inspection, the school's leadership was judged to be outstanding. Since then, the impact of that leadership has been clear because pupils' outcomes have continued to rise. In the most recent national tests, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was above average at the end of key stage 2. The attainment of disadvantaged pupils was the same as that for all pupils nationally. A high proportion of pupils are disadvantaged and they do very well.

Pupils' progress from the end of key stage 1 to the end of key stage 2 in reading, in writing and in mathematics was well above average and in the highest 10% nationally. Your monitoring information indicates that this was no flash in the pan, but a moment in your school's improvement journey that continues with further improvements for current pupils.

The areas for improvement from the previous inspection report have all been addressed effectively. Your well-established dual headship role works very effectively. Staff and parents are highly supportive. All members of staff completing

the Ofsted questionnaire are proud to work at your school. Teachers are very clear that you are mindful of their welfare so that very positive outcomes have been achieved while giving due attention to teachers' workloads. A typical comment was that, 'The focus is always on outcomes for pupils, avoiding unnecessary paperwork. The focus is on what we could do differently rather than doing more.'

In my preparation for this inspection, I noted a few possible areas for investigation based on the historical information about the school. During my inspection, I found that these had already been addressed and improved, reflecting both your sense of urgency and your tenacity in ensuring the best for the pupils in your school and more widely across Ipswich.

Your work extends beyond the school. You involve parents, for example, through the pre-school activity for very young children with their parents and through your work in encouraging fathers to read with their children, which you celebrate on a Saturday to enable maximum attendance. You both make contributions to the leadership of other schools in the multi-academy trust (MAT), for example through training other schools in the effective use of the pupil premium and in the use of assessment information to promote pupils' progress. One of you is the MAT leader for safeguarding. Other staff in the school also spread effective practice across the MAT. For example, your expert and hugely energetic and enthusiastic team of senior leaders has recently provided training workshops at an event attended by 120 teachers.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Statutory requirements regarding recruitment of staff are met and are exemplary. Contact with families and with external agencies to support the welfare of pupils is well documented. There are clear and effective systems. All staff are well trained and are alert to potential welfare concerns. Most importantly, pupils feel safe. For some, the school is a much-needed oasis of calm and security. All staff believe pupils to be safe. Very nearly all pupils responding to their questionnaire, and parents responding to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View, agree that pupils are safe and looked after well.

### **Inspection findings**

- The first of my areas of investigation was to discover why the school has been so successful at promoting the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. The school provides exceptional support for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders analyse the effectiveness of different strategies. They are quick to abandon those that are ineffective to try something new. Leaders have identified specific barriers to pupils' progress and have established effective strategies to remove these barriers. These include the effective work of the family inclusion team and ensuring that disadvantaged pupils have lots of experiences to broaden their understanding of the world and to give them exciting things to write about. Central to the strategy is ensuring that all pupils receive highly effective teaching.

The result of the school's work is that disadvantaged pupils attain in line with other pupils nationally and their progress is well above that of other pupils nationally. Essentially, in this school there is no difference in the expectations of what different pupils will achieve and all groups of pupils do extremely well.

- Historically, pupils' attendance at the school has been below average. I wanted to check what actions have been taken and how effective they have been in reducing persistent absence and improving attendance overall, especially for disadvantaged pupils or those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Attendance has risen sharply and is now at least average. Persistent absence is also now below average. No groups are now disadvantaged through poor attendance. This is the result of a renewed focus on tackling absence with specific appointments of staff to address this issue. The school promotes attendance through competitions and punctuality through the breakfast club. Staff are working hard to educate parents in the importance of regular attendance. Where this proves unsuccessful, the school is taking a robust approach to unauthorised absence.
- Historically, pupils' progress in reading has not been as strong as in writing and mathematics. I wanted to check why this was and whether it remains the case. The school has fundamentally changed its approach to reading. As a result, the teaching of reading has improved dramatically and outcomes now match those for writing and mathematics in exceeding the national expected standard in Year 6. The teaching of phonics is a strength of the school.
- Finally, I wanted to check that pupils' progress was not limited to reading, writing and mathematics, but covered a broad range of subjects. One reason for looking at this was that the published information shows pupils not doing as well in science as in English and mathematics. Leaders agree that as a response to low standards in the past, their focus was dominated by progress in English and mathematics. Nevertheless, leaders and governors have maintained a broad curriculum, ensuring coverage of the full range of national curriculum subjects. Some aspects of the curriculum, such as sports and physical education and performing arts (music and drama), are promoted very well through specialist teachers.
- Leaders recognise that the next step is to focus less on foundation subjects as a way of developing mathematics and English skills, important as they are, and more on developing the subject-specific skills needed, for example to be a historian or scientist.
- Leaders are committed to preparing pupils for their future lives. There are good links with local businesses who support the Year 5 careers day. Pupils also benefit from a money day arranged in cooperation with a local bank. Pupils have their aspirations raised and future career choices broadened through learning about the range of occupations and visiting the University of East Anglia.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers identify and assess the subject-specific skills and knowledge needed to be successful in subjects across the curriculum, beyond English and mathematics.

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 Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. During the inspection, I met with you, leaders, teachers and other staff, members of the governing body and a group of pupils. I visited all classes to observe teaching and check behaviour. I looked at pupils' books to see progress in pupils' work across a range of subjects. I observed pupils around the school and in social areas. I reviewed school documents about self-evaluation, development planning and safeguarding, including the single central record. I also considered the 30 responses to Parent View, 71 responses to the pupil survey and 36 staff questionnaires.