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Ms Lucy Wawrzyniak
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Dear Ms Wawrzyniak

Short inspection of Mabel Prichard School

Following my visit to the school on 20 March 2018 with Catherine Davies, Ofsted Inspector, 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.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

After joining the school as headteacher in September 2017, you stringently reviewed many aspects of the school's work. You worked closely with your senior leaders to draw up a programme of carefully prioritised improvements. You sensibly began by improving safeguarding and reducing levels of persistent absence. You also made sure that senior leaders had the resources they needed to make the changes required. You acknowledge that many planned actions are either in their infancy or have yet to be embarked upon. However, you are adamant that although improvements will change many aspects of the school, its kind and caring ethos will remain. When we visited classes, I was struck by how attentive teaching assistants were to pupils' care needs. The pupils with whom the other inspector and I spoke praised the school, commenting on how much they enjoyed playing a part in developing the school's environment. Pupils also told us that they feel safe and well looked after. One pupil summed up her positive feelings about the school by saying, 'I wish we could come to school at the weekends.'

However, leaders have not fully implemented the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. Efforts to strengthen the contribution that middle leaders make to developing practice in teaching, learning and assessment have not been wholly

effective. In addition, there are weaknesses in some other important aspects of the school's work: teaching assistants across the school do not make a consistently positive contribution to pupils' learning, and governance is not strong enough. As a result of these weaknesses, some pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable. You are very aware of the school's shortcomings and have detailed plans to tackle most of them.

Following our visits to classes to observe learning, we agreed that the quality of teaching varies too much across the school. Some practice is well developed, such as approaches aimed at developing pupils' communication skills. Nevertheless, in some classes practice is less effective. Sometimes, teaching assistants are not clear enough about how to support pupils in their learning. In addition, some teachers do not place enough focus on developing pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding so that pupils can work more independently where appropriate. The majority of parents and carers made glowing comments about the school in the online survey, Parent View, and also when we spoke with them informally. However, a small number of parents mentioned that teaching assistants did not always do enough to support pupils' learning, and that sometimes pupils could be stretched more.

Governors rightly recognise that their approach to holding the school to account has not been effective enough and are keen to develop their practice. Following a review of governance, they have wisely made some changes to the structure of the governing body. Although governors are regularly updated about the progress and impact of planned improvements, they are not clear enough about the scale and urgency of the changes required.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have made deep and substantial changes to safeguarding processes and procedures and they are now fit for purpose. You have ensured that records of pre-employment checks carried out on staff are detailed and accurate. You have also strengthened the system for recording concerns about pupils. It is now easier to gain a detailed overview of each pupil's concerns over a period of time. Of note is how you have involved the local authority in checking that the changes you have made are sufficient. You acknowledge that you need to sharpen the way you collate information on the safeguarding training that staff have received.

Inspection findings

- We reviewed the impact of your actions since taking up your post as headteacher. We explored whether the curriculum, including new methods of assessment, meets pupils' needs. We gathered evidence about the contribution that middle leaders make to the quality of teaching, how effectively governors oversee the school's work, and the impact of your work with a range of different partners.
- You and your leaders have successfully improved the system to track and assess pupils' progress. Leaders now regularly monitor the progress pupils make towards their end-of-year targets. However, you recognise that the system has

limitations and have strong plans in place to develop it further. Some aspects of the curriculum have been more effectively developed than others. For example, opportunities for work-based learning are well planned, but this is not the case for some aspects of numeracy and phonics.

- Middle leaders have worked well with external system leaders to develop their monitoring and evaluation skills. You have astutely provided middle leaders with the opportunity to work together as a team and share their practice. Middle leaders have recently begun to audit the quality of teaching and assessment in the subjects they oversee. However, they do not currently make a full enough contribution to improving teaching in these subjects across the primary and secondary phases.
- When we visited classes, we noticed that a number of teaching assistants did not have a secure enough understanding of the planned learning. They were therefore over-reliant on being guided by the teacher as to how to support the pupils with whom they were working. This meant that in some of the classes visited, pupils were doing very little while the assistant assigned to them waited for the class teacher's guidance.
- On occasion, when teaching approaches have been less carefully thought out, pupils require extensive additional assistance from the teacher to complete the tasks they are set. Sometimes, they are required to wait too long in order to receive this assistance.
- Some recommendations made following the review of governance have been implemented swiftly. However, governors have not got a sufficiently firm grip on several key aspects of the school. For instance, their checks on safeguarding are too informal and their oversight of pupil premium funding is sketchy. They are not clear enough about the best ways to tackle weaknesses and what their roles are in this process.
- You have successfully collaborated with partner mainstream schools. As a result, some pupils have accessed additional learning. For example, some older pupils have had the chance to take level 1 and 2 qualifications at the Oxford Academy. Effective partnerships have also assisted you in developing your work-based learning programme well.
- You have benefited from guidance provided by both the system leader who provides support on behalf of the local authority, and also the headteacher of a local special school. Together, they have worked alongside middle and senior leaders to develop their expertise. They have conducted stringent checks to evaluate the impact of the changes you have made. These checks have assisted you well in moving forward.
- Your work to support pupils with low attendance is highly individualised and includes parents well. It is starting to have an impact on improving the attendance of some pupils. You rightly place pupils' safety at the forefront when making decisions about taking pupils off roll. This carefully considered approach has a negative effect on your overall attendance figures.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching assistants make a greater contribution to pupils' learning and progress
- governors have a tighter grip on the scope and pace of improvements and are therefore able to hold leaders to account more effectively
- middle leaders play a greater role in improving teaching in the subjects they manage so that more teaching is consistently strong.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we checked safeguarding arrangements, including the records of recruitment checks, policies and procedures. We reviewed a range of information, which included the school's own evaluation and improvement plans, external audits, and information about pupils' progress. Accompanied by either you or a senior member of staff, we observed pupils while they were learning in class on both the primary and secondary sites, and in all key stages. Meetings were held with the leader responsible for post-16 learning and separately with a group of middle leaders, most of whom are also subject leaders. In addition, we held meetings with the designated safeguarding leader, with two small groups of pupils (one from the primary site and the other from the secondary site), with the chair of the governing body, accompanied by two other governors, and with the two external system leaders who have been supporting you. We met informally with parents at the start of the school day and undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work. A phone call was also made to the local authority's designated officer for safeguarding. We reviewed 10 responses to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, Parent View, including nine free-text comments. We also considered 34 responses to the staff survey.