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Mrs Angela Jarvis  
Headteacher  
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Gloucestershire  
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Dear Mrs Jarvis

### **Short inspection of Linden Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 24 April 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 2015.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have built a strong group of leaders around you. The combined efforts of leaders at all levels have resulted in the school improving quickly after a decline in its performance in 2016. Leaders' actions to improve the impact of teaching in reading, writing and mathematics have been successful in key stage 2. As a result, pupils' outcomes improved markedly in 2017.

Leaders' decisive action to raise teachers' expectations so that teaching is sufficiently challenging is proving successful. In 2017, the proportions of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, who exceeded the standards that are expected nationally in reading were above the national average. The proportion of pupils who reached the high standard in writing and mathematics improved towards the national average.

However, this is not yet replicated in the early years. In 2016 and 2017, the proportions of children who reached a good level of development, the standard that is expected nationally, dipped. Approximately half of the children started key stage 1 without the skills and knowledge that are expected for their age. At the previous inspection, you were asked to improve provision in the early years to develop children's independence and decision-making skills. This work is ongoing.

You were also asked to improve the consistency of teaching in subjects other than English and mathematics. The current curriculum is varied and interesting and challenges pupils to grow and apply their knowledge and understanding readily

across subjects. This work is effective.

Leaders and governors have an acute understanding of the school's many strengths and the aspects that require further work. Comprehensive work has already been put in place to improve the impact of teaching in the early years this year. Governors are linked to each area identified in the school's improvement plan. They are stringent in their checks on the impact of school improvement priorities. For example, governors have conducted regular visits to the school to assure themselves that early years provision is improving and the recent improvements seen in pupils' writing outcomes are being sustained. Governors challenge leaders at all levels and hold them to account successfully for the school's performance. As a result, pupils' achievement continues to improve steadily.

Most parents and carers are very positive about the school. Nearly every parent who responded to the online questionnaire Parent View would recommend the school and reported that their child is taught well and is making good progress.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff training is up to date. The school's checks when recruiting new staff are in line with national requirements. Staff apply their safeguarding training to their daily work well. Staff talk confidently about how to refer concerns. The staff who lead the safeguarding in the school work collegiately and are assiduous in their work to support the most vulnerable pupils. They are quick to spot concerns and make timely referrals to external agencies. Pupils' safeguarding records are maintained thoroughly.

The personal, social and health curriculum develops pupils' understanding of safeguarding risks well. For example, Year 6 pupils discuss the dangers of peer pressure, gangs and youth crime. Pupils talk openly about potential risks and identify how to deal with them. Pupils show respect for one another and enter into dialogue maturely about challenging concepts about keeping safe.

### **Inspection findings**

- One aspect I looked at was the impact of leaders' whole-school strategy to ensure that pupils have a good understanding of what they read. Teaching challenges pupils effectively. Pupils are routinely expected to use their comprehension skills across a range of subjects. The reading curriculum is carefully planned out. Detailed novel studies in upper key stage 2 enable pupils to gain further knowledge about complex issues. For example, when learning about crime and punishment in upper key stage 2, pupils learned about a family's difficult journey fleeing the civil war in Syria, the politics, oppression and the family's journey as refugees. Increasingly, the reading curriculum broadens pupils' knowledge and understanding about wider curriculum concepts well. It also provides pupils with stimulus to write for a range of purposes.
- My next key line of enquiry focused on the quality of provision in the early years. Across the last few months, your team has been working determinedly to remedy

the identified weaknesses in early years provision. Following staff training and external support, teaching and assessment practices in the early years are improving steadily. Teachers' and adults' assessments are increasingly accurate and teaching is more closely matched to children's needs. This is beginning to help children with lower-than-average skills and knowledge to catch up. Leaders' actions are starting to make a notable difference. However, leaders and governors rightly identify that more time is needed to ensure that recent improvements in the early years are sustained.

- I also looked at the impact of leaders' strategy to ensure that pupils achieve what they should in phonics and early reading. This is because, in the recent past, some pupils with lower-than-average attainment did not catch up and meet the standards that are expected for their age by the end of key stage 1.
- Staff have been retrained in the teaching of phonics this year and you have introduced a new phonics scheme. Its impact has not yet been evaluated. Teachers make regular assessments of pupils' knowledge and their understanding of phonics skills. However, senior and middle leaders' checks on the quality of phonics teaching are not thorough. As a result, slower rates of pupils' progress and weaknesses in the teaching of phonics are not identified and tackled quickly enough. This restricts the progress that pupils make. As a result, some lower-attaining pupils in key stage 1 do not yet demonstrate secure application of some key Year 1 sounds when reading independently.
- Another aspect I looked at was how well middle-attaining and the most able pupils are challenged so that they reach the highest standards in writing. Leaders' whole-school strategy for the teaching of writing, including spelling, punctuation and grammar, is paying off. The teaching of writing is good across the school. Current teaching is ensuring that any previous differences between disadvantaged pupils and others are diminishing quickly. Pupils experience wide-ranging opportunities to write for a variety of purposes.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers have consistently high expectations of what children can achieve in the early years, so that children make strong progress and leave Reception Year well prepared for Year 1
- leaders' checks on phonics teaching are thorough and hold staff to account for ensuring that pupils make strong progress in their early reading
- pupils use and apply their phonics skills to read and spell accurately in key stage 1 so that those pupils who have low and average attainment catch up quickly and read well.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Carrington  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I spoke with you, senior and middle leaders, and representatives from the governing body. I also met with a representative from the local authority.

We made visits to lessons to observe pupils' learning and to scrutinise their work. I looked at pupils' workbooks. I also talked to pupils in lessons and at lunchtime and listened to their views of the school. I also heard pupils read in Years 1, 2 and 3.

I considered a range of documentary evidence, which included the school's self-evaluation, development plans, and school performance information. I also looked at a variety of monitoring records for teaching, learning and assessment, your analysis of pupils' attendance, and documentation relating to pupils' behaviour and safety and safeguarding.

In addition, I took account of 56 responses to the Parent View online survey, and the free-text messaging service. I gathered the views of staff through the online questionnaire and through discussions during the inspection.