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11 June 2018

Mr Stuart Cox
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Cox

Short inspection of Whetstone Field Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 24 May 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Pupils enjoy coming to school. They flourish in the calm, positive and purposeful learning environment that you have created. You have high expectations and work in partnership with staff and parents to ensure that pupils achieve well personally, socially and academically. Parents recognise this commitment and speak highly of the school and all that it provides.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are extremely positive. They concentrate well in lessons and work effectively with partners and in groups. Pupils take pride in their work and apply themselves productively to tasks. Pupils' hard-working and conscientious attitudes to learning make a strong contribution to the high standards that they achieve. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. They conduct themselves very well around school and are polite, friendly and courteous. Pupils demonstrate understanding and tolerance for the views and beliefs of others. They show mutual respect for one another, and during my visit explained that 'everyone is equal even if they are different'.

Together with the deputy headteacher, you accurately and candidly evaluate the school's effectiveness. You have a precise understanding of what the school does well and what could be even better. This is because you make regular checks on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. You use this information to produce action plans that focus on the right priorities and contain challenging targets for improvement. As a result, there is a continual drive to improve the quality of

teaching and learning so that all pupils achieve high standards.

At the school's previous inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that expectations for the most able pupils were equally high in all classes. In mathematics, teachers plan additional challenges for pupils in order to extend their thinking and deepen their understanding. As a result, the proportion of pupils working at the higher standard in mathematics at the end of key stages 1 and 2 was above national averages in 2017. The most able pupils achieved similarly well in reading. The school's assessment information shows that the proportion of current pupils working at greater depth in reading and mathematics continues to be high. However, fewer pupils are working at greater depth in writing. This is because teachers do not provide the most able pupils with sufficient opportunities to develop their skills by writing in depth and at length.

The previous inspection report also asked leaders to provide a greater range of opportunities for pupils to learn about the different cultures represented in the United Kingdom. There are now many opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of other cultures and beliefs. Topics within the curriculum, regular trips and visitors to the school support pupils' learning well. For example, Year 5 have recently explored the history and backgrounds of people living in Birmingham. Through dedicated 'culture weeks', pupils are immersed in learning about different cultures, including music, dance, food and festivals. As a result, pupils have a clear understanding of, and respect for, a range of faiths and cultures.

Governors are ambitious for the school. They have a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further improvement. This is because they make regular checks on the school's performance and draw on a wide range of evidence, including reports from the headteacher, 'check and challenge' visits to the school, assessment information, parents' views and feedback from external consultants. Governors are rigorous in holding leaders to account for the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff receive regular training, which covers a wide range of safeguarding themes, for example the 'Prevent' agenda and child sexual exploitation. As a result, staff are knowledgeable about the potential risks that pupils may face. Staff know pupils well and are alert to any changes in pupils' behaviour or appearance. They are aware of the signs that might indicate a pupil is at risk of harm and are confident in the process to follow should they have a concern. Adults record concerns thoroughly and leaders monitor these closely to look for patterns and trends.

Pupils say that adults look after them well and are quick to resolve any problems that they may have. As a result, pupils feel safe at school. Effective curriculum provision ensures that pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations, for example when using the internet and riding a bike. Pupils also have

the opportunity to debate current issues at an age-appropriate level, for example the rise in gun crime and events in Syria. Pupils understand bullying and the different forms that it can take. They say that pupils are mostly kind to each other and that adults help to resolve any 'falling out' swiftly. 'Play leaders' also help younger pupils to get along well together. Almost all parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree that their children feel safe at school and are well looked after.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was to investigate how effectively leaders are ensuring that standards in early years and key stage 1 remain high, and if pupils are making strong progress from their different starting points.
- Children get off to a good start in early years. School assessment information shows that most children enter the school with knowledge and skills that are typical for their age. Some children start school with skills and abilities above those typically seen. As a result, adults rightly focus on planning learning that challenges children and enables them to make strong progress from their secure starting points. Adults are skilled in asking questions that extend children's thinking and encourage them to problem-solve. Consequently, the proportion of children who achieve a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year is consistently above the national average. An increasing proportion of children are working above the expected standard. This means that children are ready for learning in Year 1.
- Adults ensure that children who are working below the standards expected for their age receive the support that they need to catch up quickly with their peers. Speech and language and personal, social and emotional development are the main barriers to learning for these children. To address this, adults work closely with individuals and small groups to develop children's communication, personal and social skills. Adults use questioning skilfully to expand children's use and understanding of vocabulary and to deepen their understanding and confidence. Children learn to share and take turns. As a result, children make strong progress in these aspects of their learning and development. They work and play happily together and grow into confident learners.
- Good teaching in key stage 1 means that pupils make strong progress in reading and mathematics. As a result, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in these subjects is consistently above national averages. In 2017, the proportion of pupils working at greater depth in reading and mathematics was also above national averages.
- Pupils make good progress in writing. Consequently, the proportion of pupils who achieve the expected standard in writing has been above the national average for the past two years. However, pupils' rates of progress in writing are slower than they are in reading and mathematics. The most able pupils, in particular, do not consistently make the progress of which they are capable. As a result, fewer pupils are working at greater depth in writing than they are in reading and mathematics. This is because pupils do not have enough opportunities to practise

and reinforce their skills by writing at length.

- My second line of enquiry was to find out how well teaching meets the needs of pupils in reading and writing in key stage 2 to enable them to make good progress and achieve high standards, particularly boys.
- Pupils make good progress in reading and achieve high standards because all staff teach reading consistently well. Carefully planned reading activities help pupils to develop strong comprehension skills. Staff provide opportunities for pupils to read regularly at school and check that pupils practise their reading at home. Pupils say that they enjoy reading and that there are many interesting books from which to choose.
- Leaders have focused successfully on improving the technical aspects of pupils' writing in key stage 2. There is a clear progression of skills across the school. Work in books shows that pupils are making strong progress in their knowledge and understanding of grammar and punctuation as a result. However, pupils have too few opportunities to apply and develop the skills that they have learned by writing at length. This restricts pupils' creativity and slows their rates of progress.
- Boys' progress in reading and writing at the end of key stage 2 has been slower than that of girls for the past two years. Leaders have started to take effective action to address this. Teachers plan topics that appeal equally to the interests of boys and girls. They choose interesting texts to enthuse boys and encourage their creativity. As a result, boys spoken to during the inspection say that they enjoy reading and writing. They talked enthusiastically about books that they have studied, for example 'The Indian in the Cupboard' and 'Goodnight Mr Tom'. School assessment information shows that boys' progress is accelerating, although a gap remains between the progress and attainment of boys and girls. Leaders recognise the importance of maintaining a focus on boys' reading and writing so that this gap continues to close.
- My third line of enquiry was to explore how effectively the curriculum meets the needs and interests of pupils and enables them to make strong progress in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- Pupils access a broad and varied curriculum. For example, during my visit, Year 2 pupils thought deeply about questions they would ask God, pupils in Year 3 spoke confidently in French during a languages lesson, Year 1 pupils were engrossed in making their own hot air balloons and some pupils in Year 6 were preparing to take part in a football tournament. Teachers plan together in year group pairs to ensure that the curriculum meets pupils' needs and, where appropriate, they make links between subjects to enhance pupils' learning. Pupils have opportunities to explore their interests within each topic through regular 'initiative days', in which pupils plan tasks of their choosing. Pupils talk very positively about the interesting activities that they enjoy in school, including forest school, trips, clubs and sporting opportunities.
- Work in books shows that pupils develop good knowledge and understanding through the topics that they study. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to develop subject-specific skills, such as map-reading, analysing historical information and drawing and painting. Inconsistencies in teachers' planning mean

that pupils' skills do not develop progressively as they move through the school. Leaders recognise that by increasing the focus on subject-specific skills, pupils' progress in subjects other than English and mathematics will accelerate. To this end, leaders have rightly identified developing subject leadership as a priority for next academic year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide more opportunities for pupils to write in depth and at length so that pupils' progress accelerates and more pupils are working at greater depth
- pupils have greater opportunity to develop subject-specific skills within the wider curriculum so that they achieve as well in other subjects as they do in English and mathematics
- the role of subject leaders is developed to provide teachers with support to improve further the quality of teaching and learning across the curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Claire Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and the subject leaders for English and mathematics. I met with the chair of the governing body and six governors. I also met with your school improvement partner. I observed pupils' learning in eight parts of lessons with you and the deputy headteacher. I looked at pupils' work in a range of books with you and other senior leaders. I held a meeting with representatives from the school council and talked to pupils in lessons. I also listened to a group of pupils read. I examined a range of documentation, including information relating to current pupils' attainment and progress, the school development plan and your evaluation of the school's performance. I also scrutinised a range of safeguarding documents. I spoke to parents at the start of the school day and took into account the 35 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.