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13 July 2018

Mr Peter Fry
The Willink School
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Dear Mr Fry

Short inspection of The Willink School

Following my visit to the school on 12 June 2018 with Nicholas Simmonds, 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 February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Under your guidance the school remains very popular, and you have the overwhelming support of parents, who value the education their children receive. A typical comment from a parent responding to Ofsted's online questionnaire was: 'The culture of The Willink School has enabled our children to grow in confidence both in curricular and extra-curricular activities.'

You have built a successful leadership team and an increasingly confident and competent team of middle leaders. They are both challenged and supported well by senior leaders to help you drive the school forward. As a result, pupils' progress remains at least in line with the national average and above the national average in English, mathematics and the subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate (EBacc).

The number of pupils entered for the EBacc was higher than the national average, and the proportion of pupils who achieved the EBacc was also higher. You have worked carefully on the curriculum to ensure that this is well matched to EBacc requirements. At the same time, you have ensured that it remains personalised to the needs of individual pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. The majority of pupils take GCSE religious education. This helps to develop pupils' greater awareness of religious faiths, while providing the opportunity for them to discuss complex social and moral issues. Consequently, pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain.

Leaders know the school well, and they understand the actions that are needed to improve

pupils' outcomes further. However, the school's strategic plans do not have precise success criteria to enable leaders and governors to evaluate the success of their plans. Leaders evaluate the work of teachers so that the strong practice that exists is shared more widely, which was an area for improvement in the previous inspection report. The school has become a teaching school. You are using this to provide the opportunity for staff to share good practice more widely with other schools and, equally, learn from other schools. Although the quality of teaching is overall of a high standard, there are some slight variations in the quality of teaching within the school.

Pastoral support in the school remains very strong. Pupils repeatedly commented on the excellent support that they receive from their teachers both in and out of lessons. They like being at the school and they know that the staff are there to help them. The pupils' positive comments were replicated by the parents. As one parent said: 'Excellent school, friendly and inclusive environment ...'.

The relationships between teachers and pupils are very strong and effective. Pupils respect their teachers and, consequently, incidents of poor behaviour are rare. They are excellent ambassadors for the school.

Leadership in the sixth form is strong. Leaders have responded quickly to a dip in the performance of students following vocational courses and you have made curriculum changes to ensure that current students are able to be more successful. Progress at A level remains in line with that achieved by other students nationally.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements in school are highly effective. You have ensured that they are fit for purpose and meet statutory requirements. Record-keeping is detailed and of high quality. Staff are suitably trained and aware of their responsibilities. The link governor for safeguarding routinely checks safeguarding arrangements to ensure that they are compliant. Leaders ensure that all staff and governors are appropriately trained.

An overwhelming majority of pupils who responded to Ofsted's online survey said they feel safe in school. This was confirmed through pupils' interviews, and discussions with pupils both in lessons and during breaks. Pupils reported that bullying is very infrequent and that staff deal with it effectively when it occurs. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online and they are aware of the risks of cyber bullying and radicalisation. You have responded well to sixth-form students' requests for mental-health guidance, for example, in providing effective support from an external sixth-form mentor.

Parents are highly positive about the school, and the vast majority state that their children are happy, safe and very well supported.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, the inspection team looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision, including: the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements; the progress made by disadvantaged pupils; the variations in the outcomes between subjects; and the challenge that governors provide to the school, especially the sixth form.
- Disadvantaged pupils are working at a standard that is similar to, and often better than, that of other pupils. More importantly, their progress is broadly in line with other pupils nationally. The effective strategies that leaders have introduced to support these pupils are having a positive impact. Teachers are supporting these pupils well in lessons. As a result, they make strong progress. The support is characterised by one parent who said: 'The school is incredible and the staff have made so many adaptations to help him succeed.' Disadvantaged pupils' attendance has improved and is now closer to the high attendance of other pupils in the school.
- The next aspect that inspectors looked at was how well leaders are tackling differences in the outcomes between subjects. Leaders have implemented rigorous monitoring processes, and they have high expectations of what pupils should be achieving in all subjects. Pupils are set challenging targets that reflect the school's high expectations. Where pupils are not meeting their target grade, the school provides effective support and interventions to ensure that they make faster progress.
- Teachers demonstrate a secure understanding of their subjects and lessons are well planned. Behaviour management, when occasionally needed, is purposeful and effective. However, not all teaching and learning is of the same high quality. For example, occasionally, tasks are not matched well enough to the ability of the pupils. Also, a minority of teachers do not check thoroughly enough to make sure that pupils understand the work. A small number of low-attaining pupils, who do not receive additional help, do not improve their work as rapidly as they could. Nevertheless, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are very effectively supported and make very similar progress to their peers.
- The final aspect of the school's provision that inspectors reviewed was how well governors challenge the school, especially in relation to the provision in the sixth form. Meetings were held with sixth-form leaders and students but due to the examinations it was not possible to visit lessons. Students spoke very positively about the support and guidance they receive in preparation for life beyond school. Only a small percentage of students have not secured places to study in higher education, begin modern apprenticeships or start employment.
- Governors provide effective challenge of leaders in the sixth form to make sure that measures are in place to ensure that students are taking appropriate courses that enable them to be successful. Leaders have analysed thoroughly the reasons for the slight decline in some subjects at A level, most notably in English and sociology, in 2017. They have taken action to remedy this and, as a result, students' progress is likely to be more in line with the national average this year.
- The school's strategic plans do not include clear measures of success to enable governors and leaders to judge whether their actions are being effective in improving students' outcomes.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all teaching and learning is of an equally high standard
- their strategic plans have clear measures of success so that they are able to evaluate how well their actions are improving pupils' progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Christopher Lee
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, your senior team, subject leaders, the chair of the governing body and four other governors. They observed learning in 16 classes, jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work in lessons and reviewed a sample of pupils' work, including disadvantaged pupils' books from key stages 3 and 4. Inspectors took account of the 158 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. The lead inspector also spoke to two parents. The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with the local authority school improvement partner. Inspectors took account of the 92 responses to Ofsted's confidential staff survey. They met with groups of pupils, representing all age groups, and considered the 142 responses to the pupil questionnaire. Inspectors analysed a range of school documentation, including the school self-evaluation, the school development plan, information about pupils' achievement and attendance, safeguarding information, policies, the school website and minutes of governors' meetings.