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Mrs Joanne Knowles  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Knowles

### **Short inspection of Waterside Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 3 July 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. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Waterside Primary School is a welcoming and vibrant learning community. You were appointed to the post of headteacher shortly before the last inspection. Since then, you have established an ambitious culture. Together with other leaders and governors, you aim for the school to be the best it can be for the benefit of pupils. There is a culture of no excuses and high aspirations.

Since the last inspection, there has been a number of significant staff changes and challenges in the life of the school. Nevertheless, with the support of the wider leadership team and governors, you have tenaciously adhered to the high expectations you have set for the school.

You have addressed the areas for improvement from the last inspection very effectively. Subject leaders are now fully involved in improving teaching and learning. Many leaders have progressed in their careers as a result of effective support for leadership development. Pupils are now well supported to develop independence. They are articulate, confident and positive. They respect each other

and adults.

You have systematically improved teaching by supporting teachers to be the best that they can be. Teachers plan work that is very well matched to pupils' individual needs. Pupils receive and respond to individualised guidance on how to improve their work. Teachers expect all pupils to apply their spelling, punctuation and grammar skills consistently well in all pieces of writing.

Many pupils come into school with skills that are well below those typical for their age. The community has many challenges that have an impact on the support that families can provide for learning. Despite these challenges, children make exceptional progress. In the early years, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of Reception in 2017 was above the national average, despite their often very low starting points. In 2017, the proportions of pupils achieving and exceeding the standard expected for their age by the end of key stage 2 was much higher than the national average. In 2017, pupils made significantly better progress in reading and mathematics by the end of key stage 2 than the national average. Notwithstanding this success, you have set a challenging target for even more disadvantaged pupils to achieve at greater depth in reading.

Teachers have high expectations and ambitions for all pupils to achieve to the best of their ability. Lessons are exciting and engaging. Pupils enjoy learning and they say that teachers make learning fun. Pupils make exceptional progress because teachers design stimulating tasks that address pupils' individual needs and starting points.

Governors are committed to the school. They want to see every child achieve well academically. However, governors also recognise the importance of developing pupils' other skills, such as social and cultural awareness. They understand that many pupils need additional support to become independent and mature citizens in their own right. They are rightly proud of the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities, such as sporting, artistic and musical activities, that all pupils have, particularly disadvantaged pupils, to develop skills outside the classroom. As a result of these opportunities, pupils develop the confidence that they need to help them progress to the next stage of their education successfully.

Pupils behave very well around school. They support each other at breaks and play well together. At lunchtime, pupils take part in craft activities, as well as games such as football and tennis. They can use the trim trail or take the Waterside mile challenge, running one mile by finding markers in the school grounds.

Lessons in philosophy help pupils to discuss challenging and thought-provoking concepts in a safe environment. In such a diverse community, this helps pupils to build trust and respect for each other. Pupils feel safe in school. They are happy here. One child's feelings reflected the feelings of many when she said, 'This is the best school.'

Leaders invest in staff. Staff appreciate the support that is provided to help them develop as effective practitioners. Staff are coached by senior leaders to reflect on

their practice and find their own solutions with support. Much of the teaching and practice in school is worthy of further dissemination, particularly in the early years. Many leaders have been supported to develop their leadership skills and gain promoted posts.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a culture of vigilance among all staff. Referrals show that staff are alert to spotting signs of potential abuse or neglect.

As senior designated safeguarding leader (DSL), you and others follow up on referrals tenaciously. Referrals are appropriately made and pursued in a timely and relentless fashion so that all children are safe. The school works very well with external partners, such as the police and children's social care. The handling of a recent, high profile, local issue has been recognised nationally as exemplary practice by the police and the Department for Education.

Pupils say that bullying is rare and, if it happens, it is dealt with swiftly by teachers. When bullying does occur, staff encourage and support pupils to work together to find a solution and make friends.

### **Inspection findings**

- At the end of key stage 2 in 2017, pupils' attainment in reading and mathematics exceeded the national averages, including at greater depth. Progress in reading and mathematics was similarly well above the national average. However, outcomes for writing were not quite as strong. You put in place a number of sharply focused initiatives to improve outcomes in writing, including revising the marking policy, which is now consistently applied. Teachers expect the same high standards of presentation and accuracy in terms of spelling, punctuation and grammar in all pieces of writing across the curriculum. Work in pupils' books shows that, because spelling and grammatical errors are consistently identified and addressed, mistakes do not persist. As a result, pupils' writing is grammatically correct and of a very high standard.
- Outcomes for writing are improving to be more in line with the exceptional standards in reading and mathematics. The proportion of pupils achieving greater depth in writing by the end of key stage 2 increased considerably this year, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. In early years, children's writing shows exceptional progress from very low starting points. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the phonics screening check has been well above the national average for the last two years.
- The engaging curriculum is underpinned by the school's values, which include resilience, excellence and inspiration. Lessons are designed to reflect these values. Tasks have increasing levels of challenge – bronze, silver, gold, platinum or diamond. Pupils choose the level that is right for them. Many pupils choose the higher challenges because they are eager to achieve to the best of their ability. Platinum and diamond challenges extend beyond the standard expected for their age. Pupils access the curriculum at the most appropriate level for them. In this

way, the curriculum is adapted and amended to suit the needs of all pupils, including the most able, some of whom access GCSE-level mathematics problems.

- Disadvantaged pupils achieve very well at Waterside Primary School. Based on research evidence, you have focused on improving the quality of class teaching to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met effectively. Any interventions take place outside normal lesson times. In this way, pupils who need additional support do not miss any part of the curriculum. For example, pupils attend early morning reading sessions. Interventions are tailored to the individual pupils' needs. Additional activities offered focus on pupils' strengths and interests. Disadvantaged pupils benefit from a wide range of subsidised extra-curricular activities, trips and visits that they may not otherwise experience. Support to improve attendance has had a dramatic impact on reducing persistent absence. As a result, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make strong progress. Attainment for disadvantaged pupils in reading and mathematics in 2017, at the end of key stage 2, was well above the national averages at the standard expected for their age.
- The curriculum is based on the principle that children learn better when they are active. During the inspection, we observed together a number of highly engaging lessons where pupils demonstrated their love of learning. As a result, they made excellent progress. For example, children in early years were learning phonics outside, singing and dancing as they learned new letter sounds. When the teacher asked for an example of a word spelled with the 'igh' combination of letters, one child said, 'In the middle of the night.' This demonstrates an impressive grasp of phonics at such a young age. In key stage 2 mathematics, pupils were calculating the area and perimeter of different table formations. Seeing the physical manifestation of their calculations on paper helped them to understand the concept of shape and space. In key stage 1, pupils used sophisticated vocabulary such as 'symmetrical' and 'chrysalis' confidently in their answers to teachers' questions.
- Leaders and governors recognise that the excellent practice at Waterside Primary School is worth sharing more widely. They also recognise that staff learn from working with other schools. To this end, governors have supported your recent successful application to become a national leader of education. The school has also joined a federation of other local schools as part of a strategic action plan to facilitate sharing good practice more widely. Leaders and governors know that there is capacity within the senior leadership team to support this wider outreach work, while maintaining the high quality of the pupils' experiences at Waterside.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that the excellent practice that exists across the school is shared more widely, particularly in relation to:

- improving teaching and learning, particularly in the early years and in phonics teaching
- leadership and management, specifically setting high expectations and establishing an ambitious culture and driving school improvement
- safeguarding practice, including, but not exclusively, working with external partners and the community to prevent radicalisation and extremism
- ensuring that all pupils achieve well, regardless of their starting points, through strategic support and interventions, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Jane Spilsbury  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you and the senior assistant headteacher to discuss the school's self-evaluation and school development plan. Together, we reviewed information about attendance, behaviour, exclusions and current assessment.

I visited lessons with you in the early years and key stage 1. I visited lessons in key stage 2 with the senior assistant headteacher. We looked at pupils' books during our visits to lessons.

I observed pupils at lunchtime in the playground. I spoke to pupils about what they like about school and how they stay safe. I had a tour of the school with two pupils.

I met with you as the DSL about safeguarding. I also met with representatives from the governing body, including the chair and vice chair. I scrutinised a selection of governing body minutes.

I took account of 34 responses to the staff survey and 20 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. There were no responses to the pupil survey on the day of the inspection. However, I took into account the responses to the recent pupil survey published on the school website.