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Mrs Jane Hemery
Headteacher
Willowcroft Community School
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Dear Mrs Hemery

Short inspection of Willowcroft Community School

Following my visit to the school on 26 September 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 your 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 and your deputy headteacher work extremely well together. You both radiate utter devotion to Willowcroft pupils, determined to see them all succeed. Collectively, you evaluate the school's strengths and weaknesses meticulously, leaving no stone unturned. You both have a deep-seated understanding of the needs of the families the school serves, holding these firmly at the centre of your work. As a result, you can pinpoint precisely what the school needs to do to continue to improve and, most significantly, serve its community well. The school's ambition of 'working together, we will bring the school to the heart of the community' is fully exemplified by your work.

The school's population contains a significant proportion of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Pupils join the school with skills and understanding below those seen typically. You know that the school serves a high proportion of vulnerable pupils. Your work is characterised by ceaseless energy and effort to support pupils and their families to the utmost extent. Consequently, following the closure of the local children's centre, you have forged strong links to outside agencies such as professionals in health care. One parent, echoing the views of many, commented:

'Whenever I have had concerns about my children or problems that they may be facing, I have been taken seriously. They [the staff] go out of their way to resolve any problems or put extra support in place. The children's well-being and education is their top priority.'

Over the last two years, you and your governors have monitored attendance closely and introduced new incentives to encourage pupils to attend routinely. However, you acknowledge that these measures, such as rewards, have not had a strong enough impact, particularly on those pupils who are persistently absent. Your dedication to encouraging pupils to attend repeatedly shines through. This year, you have adapted the school's policy and included new, more stringent measures. Parents are fully versed in your raised expectations, and initial signs, albeit very early on in the academic year, are promising. Nevertheless, not content with this early success, you are determined to reduce further the rate of absenteeism for some pupils.

The school's provision meets pupils' needs very effectively and, from below typical starting points, pupils make good progress. Consequently, by the time they leave the school, many have caught up and achieve age-related standards in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2018, pupils in key stages 1 and 2 achieved well in reading. Provisional information shows that the proportion achieving age-related expectations in this subject is likely to be in line with that seen nationally. However, too few achieve at greater depth. Although pupils read often, particularly in phonics lessons and guided reading sessions, their experience of a wide-ranging breadth of literature is not promoted so strongly. This limits pupils' experience of books and inhibits their eagerness to read more widely.

You have addressed systematically the areas for improvement identified at your previous inspection. At the time of the last inspection, leaders were asked to strengthen the quality of teaching to raise pupils' achievement further. You ensure that staff are well versed on the school's priorities. They, too, work enthusiastically to contribute to the school's upward trajectory, appreciating the professional development opportunities on hand. Staff, including those at an early stage of their careers, receive helpful support. The school belongs to the Oxfordshire Primary Education Network (OPEN), an umbrella trust which is made up of local headteachers and the respective chairs of their governing bodies. Willowcroft leaders receive helpful challenge and support, particularly centred upon the provision of high-quality teaching. This peer-to-peer support is helpful to leaders as it casts an experienced and insightful external eye over the quality of provision. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning has continued to strengthen.

At the last inspection you were also asked to improve pupils' behaviour and attitudes, particularly in relation to the presentation of their work. Pupils behave well and understand the importance of being kind to one another. Lessons proceed smoothly and are free of disruption. Parents are very positive about the example adults set to pupils. One parent noted: 'Teachers are keen on pupils acting kindly towards each other and will not tolerate bullying. They reward pupils for good work, for good acts, for trying and for making good progress.'

Pupils' presentational skills are also improving, as they exhibit a growing satisfaction in learning well. Nevertheless, some pupils are not yet writing in a sustained manner and achieving as well as they are capable, including the most able.

Safeguarding is effective.

Able led by you, your staff are equally passionate about ensuring that pupils are safe, cared for, and well looked after. Parents hugely appreciate the support that their families receive. They value the nurturing atmosphere and, as a result, the confidence that exudes from their children. Equally, parents appreciate the timely help and advice on offer. One parent commented:

'The school is a fantastic place for my children to grow and develop. Staff support pupils and families when there are difficulties and act straight away rather than letting situations escalate. I am a proud parent and recommend the school to everyone!'

You are extremely knowledgeable about safeguarding and display a high level of expertise in this regard. Systems and processes are rigorous and kept under watchful review. However, the difference you can make is sometimes hindered by the slow response of others, including representatives from social care and the education inclusion service. Nevertheless, you and your staff display the highest levels of tenacity, pursuing cases until you receive a satisfactory response. Your staff, including the school's special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and safeguarding and welfare officer play their part extremely effectively. You are tremendously well supported because everyone shares your passion for keeping pupils' best interests at the top of the list.

Inspection findings

- Pupils make good progress in reading. You have adapted the curriculum appropriately and ensure that staff are well trained in how to teach phonics. Pupils read often and enjoy regular visits to the school's library. Standards in reading have risen, including in the Year 1 phonics screening check. Pupils in Year 1 achieved well in 2018, with most meeting the standard required.
- Pupils enjoy writing, and several commented that English is their favourite subject. Leaders have made helpful adaptations to the teaching of writing, adopting a storytelling approach. Pupils have opportunities to write for a range of purposes and quickly get to grips with new genres because teachers have secure subject knowledge. For example, in a Year 2 activity, pupils were able to use imperative verbs accurately to write instructions on how to make a smoothie.
- Leaders are beginning to narrow the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, particularly in the early years. In 2018, more disadvantaged pupils achieved a good level of development when compared to the previous year.
- Pupils behave well, and those that spoke to the inspector can even recite the school's 'golden rules' off by heart. The school's expectations are exacting and fully understood by pupils. They are courteous towards adults and kind to each other. Pupils enjoy their schooling and cite friendships and the care of their teachers as top of the list.
- Attendance has improved this term when compared to the same period last year. This indicates that new measures are already making a difference. Parents are

positive about the experiences of their children and many are looking forward to the year ahead. One commented: 'Following the recent meet the teacher event, I am really excited about what the next school year holds for my daughter.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they accelerate the progress of the most able pupils and the most able disadvantaged in writing, so that even more achieve or exceed the standards expected for their age by improving their writing stamina
- pupils, particularly in key stage 2, read even more widely and develop a secure love of reading so that more exceed age-related expectations
- pupils' attendance continues to improve so that more pupils attend school regularly.

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

Elizabeth Farr
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the chair of the governing body and another governor. I met staff who hold additional responsibilities, including the school's SENCo, representatives from the OPEN trust, including two local headteachers, and the school's educational adviser. I also met with six pupils in key stage 2 and talked to pupils during learning activities. I observed learning in all phases, all jointly with the headteacher. I visited two pupils who were accessing Didcot Early Nurture Centre, an alternative provider which offers specialist support for pupils on site. I considered 36 responses to the staff survey and 23 responses to the pupil survey. I took account of 53 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 25 free-text comments. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including information about pupils' achievement, the school improvement plan and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness.