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Mrs Kirsten Warren
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Dear Mrs Warren

Short inspection of Willows Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 November 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 October 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. As pupils arrive at the gates each morning, members of staff greet them warmly to ensure that they have a positive start to the day. The school building is a bright and stimulating learning environment that celebrates the work and achievements of the pupils well.

You have evaluated the effectiveness of the school well. With the staff and senior leaders, you have identified areas of strengths within the school as well as areas that need to be developed further. For example, you recognise that the progress that pupils make in writing is not as strong as the progress that they make in reading and mathematics. Sometimes, leaders do not share information widely across the school when they check the quality of pupils' work. Your new plans to develop the curriculum have led you to focus on a greater coverage of skills. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of this work.

Pupils continue to do well at this school. Attendance remains a strength of the school. Children get off to a good start in the early years with the majority of them achieving a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year. By the end of key stage 1, pupils typically do better than other pupils nationally. By the end of Year 6, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics has been much higher than that of other pupils nationally for several years.

Parents and carers hold the school in high regard. They were overwhelmingly

positive in sharing the many strengths of the school. They appreciate that you demonstrate empathy and genuine care towards the pupils. Parents said that the behaviour of pupils is good and that pupils are safe in school. Those that I spoke to and those who responded to the Ofsted surveys were equally positive in their views. Most parents said that they would recommend this school.

The behaviour of the pupils continues to be a strength of the school. Pupils are friendly, polite and keen to discuss their learning. Those that I spoke to said that behaviour is good, but sometimes they argue when playing cricket. Older pupils told me about the opportunities that they have to become leaders. For example, they can become librarians, sports captains or members of the games squad. Pupils said that bullying and name-calling are very rare. They said that they can talk to you or other members of staff if they are worried. They like that they can write out their worries and place them in the worry box in the library where an adult will find them and talk with them. Pupils said that you and the staff treat them fairly. Pupils have a sound understanding of equality, and they spoke to me with a strong awareness of mental health issues in young people.

Governors are keen for this school to remain a good school that serves the pupils and their families well. They take an active role in the life of the school. For example, each governor is assigned to a specific key stage. They work alongside the staff to further develop their understanding of the strengths and areas for development within the school. Governors said that they particularly gain a lot from talking to pupils about their work. Governors have ensured that all safeguarding measures in place are effective.

At the previous inspection, the inspectors asked you to speed up the rates of progress made by pupils in writing. Since then, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standards by the end of key stage 2 has been consistently above the national average for several years. The progress that pupils make in writing has continued to improve each year. You have put a range of training in place for teachers and teaching assistants to further improve their subject knowledge of the writing process. For example, you have targeted your training to specifically ensure that the application of grammar, spelling and punctuation is taught effectively. The most able pupils receive effective challenge in their work. From looking at pupils' books and talking to pupils about their work, I could see clear evidence that writing in the school is strong across the curriculum. You have ensured that pupils have a sound understanding of how to improve their writing further. Despite continued rising pupil attainment, in several year groups pupils' progress in writing is not as strong as in reading and mathematics.

Inspectors also asked you to build on the effectiveness of leadership and management. Across the school, teachers have opportunities to take on subject leadership roles. Within these roles they make regular checks on the quality of pupils' work in their subject areas. They receive regular training from other teachers in the school who give them up-to-date information for each subject. For example, in science, the whole school embarked on a project to attain a national accreditation. As part of this process, the leader for science worked alongside

teachers to provide training to raise the profile of the subject within school while monitoring carefully the quality of pupils' work. Teachers said that they find it useful to receive training from their peers because it helps them to ask any follow-on questions over time. They also work alongside subject leaders from other schools in the Trafford area. Teachers said that it is helpful for them to share examples of pupils' work with other leaders; they said it helped them measure the progress that pupils make in this school more accurately.

Safeguarding is effective.

As the designated lead for safeguarding, you have ensured that all safeguarding measures in place are effective. You have maintained strong relationships with children's social care and several national charities. You have created a strong culture that encourages children to speak out in order to stay safe. All staff members have received appropriate safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty training. Members of staff that I spoke to were clear in the procedures to follow to safeguard children. You, the deputy headteacher and three members of the governing body have received training in safer recruitment.

You keep detailed records of your work with partner agencies. Parents that I spoke to and those that responded to the Ofsted surveys were confident that their children were safe in school. Pupils are knowledgeable about safeguarding. They are knowledgeable about the benefits and dangers of social media use. They know not to share their personal information or to chat with strangers through online computer games.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, I focused on three key lines of enquiry. The first of these focused on the quality of phonics provision across the school. The proportion of pupils achieving the required standard in the phonics screening check fell in 2017. This improved in 2018 but unvalidated performance data indicates that this figure will remain marginally lower than the national average. As a result of the dip in attainment in 2017, you put into place a series of further training opportunities for teachers and teaching assistants. As well as this, pupils are now organised into small teaching groups. You said that this helps you to ensure that pupils receive specific targeted teaching. Evidence from visits to classrooms to see phonics sessions, talking to pupils and viewing examples of their work indicates that the provision for phonics within the school is strong. Work in pupils' books and on displays shows that they apply their phonics well to their written work.
- The second area that I looked at related to the progress that the most able boys make in writing. Published pupil performance information indicates that these boys do not make the progress that they are capable of. As part of my wider investigations into the quality of writing, I paid attention to the quality of boys' writing across the school. From observing teaching, learning and assessment, looking in pupils' books and talking to boys about their writing, I could see that boys are making strong progress. You have carefully tailored writing

opportunities to ensure that these boys remain engaged. For example, a topic relating to the Second World War and another in relation to wizards and dragons are keeping the boys and girls well engaged. A renewed focus on breaking the writing process down into manageable chunks and encouraging pupils to talk about their writing has led to pupils not being overburdened by lengthy writing tasks. School performance information for current pupils shows that boys are now making improved progress. You make regular checks on the quality of writing within year group teams. The information gathered from these and similar checking exercises in other subject areas is not shared well across the school. As a result, opportunities to have a sharper overall focus on the identified strengths and weaknesses are not acted upon quickly.

- The final area that I focused on during this inspection related to the curriculum that you offer to the pupils. Information on the school website is complicated and difficult to interpret. However, in discussion with you, I found that you have a clear vision for the curriculum. You said that you wanted pupils to find out what they are good at through a range of experiences. Many trips and visits enrich the curriculum. The pupils have many opportunities to engage in sporting and artistic activities. The school has had recent successes in tri-golf and football competitions. As part of your continuing curriculum development, you have moved away from focusing on six topics each year to focusing on three topics each year. You did this to ensure that pupils have sufficient opportunities to develop subject-specific skills in even more depth. Pupils said that they enjoy their topics; they said that they are always different and fun. They told me all about their work on the Egyptians and a trip to a museum, and that they had visited a Tudor mansion as part of their history work. It is too early to measure the impact of this work yet because systems are not fully in place to allow leaders to measure how pupils' skills develop and progress over time.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the progress that pupils make in writing improves further to be in line with the progress pupils make in reading and mathematics
- they sharpen the focus on whole-school monitoring activities to better share information to impact on pupils' progress
- they continue to develop systems to measure how pupils' skills develop and progress over time.

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

Yours sincerely

John Donald
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

With you, I carried out visits to classes in all year groups. I scrutinised a wide range of school documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan and the single central record. I checked on the quality of information relating to the safe recruitment of staff.

I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I met with the two members of the governing board, including the chair of governors. I held a meeting with the deputy headteacher and two members of the middle leadership team. I spoke to pupils informally throughout the day. I spoke to parents before school.

I looked at examples of pupils' work in all the classes that I visited. I carried out a more formal check on books with members of the senior and middle leadership teams.

I considered the 80 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. I considered the 97 pupil survey responses and the 21 staff survey responses. I considered the 44 free-text responses.