

18 December 2018

Mrs Emma Ransom  
Headteacher  
Upton Priory School  
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Cheshire  
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Dear Mrs Ransom

### **Short inspection of Upton Priory School**

Following my visit to the school on 4 December 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 predecessor school was judged to be good in January 2015.

### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since you took up your post as headteacher, your focused and determined leadership has steadied the ship, following a period of significant turbulence which had threatened to knock it off course. You have galvanised the staff team and secured strong support from parents and carers. As a result, leadership and governance have been reinvigorated and staff morale is high. The downward trend in standards in English and mathematics seen in recent years has been reversed and everyone is pulling together to keep the school moving forward.

The school's highly successful relationship with the Fallibroome Trust has been an important factor in the school's ongoing improvement. The trust has provided very effective support for the school's leaders and governors, which has been carefully tailored to meet the school's needs. When governors first approached the trust with concerns about the school's direction of travel, the trust provided intensive support. Now that the school is firmly back on track and providing a good standard of education, the trust offers staff and leaders the chance to share good practice with other trust schools. This aptly illustrates the well-earned confidence that the trust's leaders have in the leadership and governance now in place at Upton Priory.

You are highly ambitious for the school and have ensured that everyone shares the same vision for excellence. The school's improvement planning is rigorous and reflects the very accurate and honest view that you and your fellow leaders have of the school's current strengths and areas for development. You know that outcomes

in key stage 1, and for most-able pupils in writing, are in need of further improvement. You are also keen to continue to strengthen the already good quality of teaching in the school. To this end, you have successfully created an environment in which teachers actively and enthusiastically discuss teaching strategies and pedagogy.

You have ensured that the areas for improvement identified when your predecessor school was last inspected have been addressed. Children in early years now benefit from an attractive and well-equipped outdoor learning environment. Results in the key stage 2 grammar, punctuation and spelling tests show that this has become an area of real strength for the school. Middle leaders say that they feel empowered to speak up and make a difference to their areas of learning. The quality now evident in teaching and pupils' learning in mathematics illustrates the impact that subject leaders are having. The school's curriculum is broad and well balanced.

Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and can talk confidently about their favourite aspects of school. Pupils in key stage 2 are particularly enthusiastic about the opportunities that they get to play different musical instruments, and provision in music is clearly a strength of the school. Pupils also appreciate the educational trips they go on that enhance their learning, such as visiting the air-raid shelters in Stockport as part of their work about the Second World War. The curriculum is further enriched by a good programme of extra-curricular activities.

Pupils are polite and articulate. Their conduct around school and on the separate key stages 1 and 2 playgrounds is good. Staff make sure that support is provided to the small number of pupils who might occasionally struggle to manage their own behaviour. Pupils have a keen sense of right and wrong. The pupils that I spoke to were eager to explain that everyone is treated equally and fairly in their school.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has successfully established a strong safeguarding culture in the school. They make sure that appropriate checks are made on staff, governors, volunteers and regular visitors to the school to ensure that they are suitable people to work with children. Records of these checks, along with other records relating to safeguarding, are detailed and of a good quality.

Safeguarding training is delivered regularly and staff have a good understanding of how to deal with any worries that they might have about a pupil's welfare. Leaders work well with other agencies to ensure that any such concerns are dealt with promptly. Pupils are taught how to stay safe online, such as by not sharing passwords or personal details over the internet. Pupils confirm that they feel safe in school and that staff look after them well.

### **Inspection findings**

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry, the first of which considered how effectively the school was providing support for disadvantaged

pupils. Over recent years, disadvantaged pupils' attainment and progress have been weaker than those of other pupils nationally, with results in key stage 2 in 2018 suggesting that this gap was widening.

- You and your fellow school leaders recognised the same concerns and commissioned a detailed external review of provision for disadvantaged pupils. This identified that the school did not, at that point, have a coherent strategy for either using the pupil premium funding effectively or evaluating its impact.
- The school's new pupil premium strategy is far more focused. Additional support for disadvantaged pupils has been planned much more thoroughly, and regular checks are made to see what impact this is having. Teachers say that they are now being held to account for how well disadvantaged pupils are progressing, and governors too are taking greater responsibility for ensuring that provision is effective. The school's assessment information and pupils' work show that the difference between disadvantaged pupils' attainment and progress and those of others in the school is diminishing rapidly. It is, however, too early for the improvements that have been made for current pupils to be reflected in published data.
- The second line of enquiry looked at pupils' attainment in writing. I was particularly interested to see why, over time, far fewer pupils have achieved greater depth in writing than have reached the higher standards in mathematics, reading and grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- Improving pupils' outcomes in writing has been a key part of the school's development planning. Leadership roles in English have been split to allow a group of middle leaders to focus on securing improvements in different aspects of the subject. These leaders have made good use of external support, and have introduced strategies that have been shown to work in similar schools. The teaching of writing in key stage 2 is now structured much more coherently, and teachers have a clear picture of the high standard of work that they should be expecting from pupils. Work in pupils' books shows that most-able pupils are now producing work of that quality, using a wide vocabulary and adapting their writing for different purposes.
- My final line of enquiry looked at the quality of teaching and learning in key stage 1, as pupils' attainment in the Year 2 assessments has been below average for the past two years. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check also declined in 2018.
- You have addressed pockets of weaker teaching in key stage 1, and ensured that teachers have access to good-quality professional development, much of which is provided by the trust. You and the leadership team have also overhauled the school's systems for assessing and checking on pupils' attainment and progress, so that teachers are able to plan more accurately to meet pupils' learning needs. These actions have helped to ensure that teaching across key stage 1 is becoming increasingly effective. This is particularly evident in the teaching of mathematics. Teachers skilfully balance work on number fluency, problem-solving and reasoning, and pupils are now making strong progress.
- Phonics is being taught in a more systematic way across early years and key stage 1. The school's improved checks on pupils' progress show clear

improvements in pupils' acquisition of phonic knowledge. Pupils are grouped so that teaching is typically well matched to their current needs. Staff have received training to ensure that their subject knowledge is strong, and they use similar teaching strategies to provide continuity in pupils' learning as they move through the phonics phases. However, this continuity is not evident in the resources used by staff, which are drawn from a range of sources and at times provide pupils with mixed messages in areas such as letter formation.

- The quality of pupils' written work in key stage 1 is improving, albeit at a slower rate than in key stage 2. Teachers are developing pupils' writing skills, but the process of developing skills and then giving pupils a chance to practise them is less well planned than in key stage 2. As a result, the proportion of most-able pupils in key stage 1 working at greater depth is rising more slowly.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvements evident in the teaching of writing in key stage 2 are mirrored in key stage 1 in order to raise attainment, particularly for most-able pupils
- a more consistent approach is taken to choosing phonics resources so that there is greater continuity in pupils' learning
- they continue to embed improvements in the support for disadvantaged pupils in order to strengthen the progress that these pupils make.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cheshire East. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Neil Dixon

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this short inspection, I met with you and other school leaders, including those responsible for leading different aspects of English provision and the phase leader for key stage 1. I also had meetings with the chief executive officer and one of the trustees of the Fallibroome Trust and members of the school's local governing body. I met with groups of pupils and staff and considered 29 responses to the staff survey. I took into account 35 responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I visited classes in the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2, and I looked at examples of pupils' work jointly with you and the trust's primary executive headteacher. I also studied a range of documentation covering different aspects of the school's work.