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Mrs Donna Ellison
Headteacher
Whitnash Primary School
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Dear Mrs Ellison

Short inspection of Whitnash Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 18 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 the school was judged to be good in September 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection.

Your capable leadership and committed governance have injected an infectious energy into school improvement and many aspects of the school's work have strengthened. Academic standards, which dipped for a while, have now risen. Attendance rates have increased, and good behaviour is recognised and rewarded. Pupils, staff, governors and parents report that everyone is treated fairly and with respect.

Parents say that you and the staff are very approachable and take a keen interest in pupils' lives and families. In turn, pupils know that the school helps them to make the most of their abilities and opportunities.

You have acted upon the recommendations made by the previous inspection, which were about improving aspects of teaching and assessment. Teaching in all classes is effective and the curriculum is full of interesting subjects and activities. Subject leadership has strengthened and is now ready for a further phase of development.

Currently, standards in writing and mathematics, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, are stronger than in reading. This is why raising standards in reading is an important next step for the school.

You have very effective systems in place to support pupils, parents and staff. You

make sure that their ideas, worries or questions are heard and responded to in constructive ways. Whether pupils arrive at school ready to learn or find it difficult to settle, you and the staff team make sure that everyone feels safe, included and cared for.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff safeguarding training is up to date and all staff are alert to any warning signs that indicate that a pupil may be at risk or worried about something. Staff are quick to act on concerns and work with other professional services to support families and keep pupils safe.

All the proper employment checks on staff are carried out and recorded correctly. Unexplained pupil absences are followed up promptly and leaders analyse attendance records to check for any patterns.

The school site is well maintained, kept tidy and secure. Access into the building is controlled and there are efficient routines for responding to playground accidents and rehearsing emergency procedures. Medicines in school are stored correctly and pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe in different situations.

Inspection findings

- Children's starting points on entry to school vary quite considerably, but many start with a level of knowledge and skill below that typical for their age. Good communication with parents and nurseries helps the early years team to make informed assessments about what the children know, and staff use this information to plan interesting lessons that meet their needs. Furthermore, all staff are quick to seize upon opportunities to build up children's confidence and develop their communication skills. For instance, there is a well-organised and systematic approach to the teaching of early reading. Daily phonics sessions are brisk, good-humoured, purposeful and effective. Staff speak kindly to children and, through their words and actions, they promote and reinforce positive behaviours. Indeed, to help the children understand what positive learning behaviour looks like, staff have devised child-friendly fictional characters to represent features of effective learning. Peter Pug, for example, rewards children who have persevered at a task while Iggy Iguana is used to congratulate children who have brought imagination to their work and play. Children settle in quickly because they feel encouraged, safe and secure.
- This constructive start in the early years sets children up well for learning in the rest of the school. Throughout key stages 1 and 2, pupils benefit from lively and imaginative teaching that enables them to build further on their previous learning. In all classes, pupils enjoy their lessons and learn a lot.
- That said, following the previous inspection, the quality of teaching slipped and attainment in reading, writing and mathematics declined. More recently, this decline has been reversed and attainment has risen. In fact, in 2018 attainment in writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 was above national figures.

This represents very strong progress across the school in both these subjects.

- Attainment in reading has also risen but it has not kept up with mathematics and writing. Disadvantaged pupils, in particular, are further behind others in their reading than in other subjects. In response, you have put different programmes in place to generate interest in reading. An author has visited the school to work with pupils, numerous displays celebrate the value of reading for pleasure and competitions help to motivate reluctant readers. On top of this, classwork regularly requires pupils to read from high-quality texts. During this inspection, for example, older pupils examined some poetry about the First World War and discussed the poet's use of language and the meaning of words. Elsewhere, many classrooms include displays and resources that highlight the value of reading widely and building up a broad vocabulary. This work is starting to pay off and pupils' enthusiasm, comprehension and fluency are improving.
- But it is not all about English and mathematics. At Whitnash Primary School, a typical school week is full of different subjects and activities that open pupils' eyes to the breadth of human knowledge, creativity and the world around them. Some of the work in these other subjects is top-notch. The range and quality of art work, for example, is superb. Similarly, the school's work in science has been recognised by a recent quality award. Indeed, the school emphasises the importance of hands-on work in these subjects by providing dedicated classrooms for art and science. Both these rooms are set up with resources and information that prompt curiosity, fuel imagination and lift aspirations.
- In most subjects, leaders have thought carefully about the progression of knowledge and skills to be taught across the school. In physical education (PE), for instance, this is exemplified in an eye-catching display of photographs showing how expectations of teaching and learning in gymnastics change as pupils move from one class to the next. This well-organised approach to curriculum design is the result of effective subject leadership that has grown and developed in recent times. Subject leaders do their jobs well. They appreciate and respond well to the support, training and challenge that senior leaders provide. Currently, however, they are not fully involved in setting school improvement priorities.
- In addition to their lessons, pupils can participate in numerous activities that help them to develop valuable life skills. A gardening club, cookery class and additional PE sessions teach pupils about the importance of healthy lifestyles. Furthermore, governors' and leaders' commitment to the welfare and well-being of staff and pupils has helped to create a constructive, reflective and optimistic workplace for all.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- raise attainment in reading, especially for disadvantaged pupils, so that it is more in line with the higher attainment seen in writing and mathematics
- continue to develop the role of subject leaders so that they are more involved in

setting school improvement priorities.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Pye
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and members of the staff team. I also met with three governors and an educational consultant. I carried out short observations of teaching, and looked at pupils' work in books and on display. I talked with pupils in lessons and at lunchtime. I spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day.

By the end of the inspection, there were 55 recent responses on Parent View and 36 free-text responses. I took account of these and also considered the 12 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

I looked at several documents, including: the school's own evaluation of its performance; improvement plans; information about the work of governors; external reports about the school; and several school policy documents. I also checked the school's website and the procedures for keeping pupils safe. I asked the staff, pupils and parents about safeguarding matters.