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Mr Robert Cook
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Cook

Short inspection of Watling Lower School

Following my visit to the school on 21 February 2019, 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 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

Leaders and governors have successfully managed a period of change at the school and provide effective leadership to staff and pupils. A reduction in the need for school places has led to the school having fewer pupils. In turn, this has resulted in changes in staffing, and a need to manage finances carefully. Leaders and governors have not been distracted from maintaining the standard of teaching, learning and assessment and providing a good, all-round experience for pupils. Almost all parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were positive about the school's work. Staff are supportive of leaders and feel well supported in return. All are happy and proud to work at the school.

As soon as you were appointed, in September 2018, you made sure that you got to know the school quickly. You have identified what the school does well and what it could do even better. Your accurate evaluation underpins your improvement planning and the actions you have taken to achieve your priorities. For example, you have strengthened the arrangements for managing teachers' performance to further improve pupils' outcomes and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Teachers' objectives reflect whole-school priorities as well as their individual professional development needs.

Leaders have made good progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. For example, teachers' expectations of the

quality of handwriting and pupils' use of grammar, punctuation and spelling are consistently high. This results in pupils' writing being of the same standard in other subjects as it is in their English books. Pupils learn successfully to write for a variety of different purposes and audiences.

Leaders have established a culture where pupils are accepting of difference and show respect and tolerance towards others. This contributes strongly to the school's welcoming feel and supportive atmosphere. As one parent correctly stated: 'The children learn about and embrace different cultures and are taught strong values which will help them not just academically but in their everyday life and learning about the world around them.'

Members of the governing body have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Governors agree the priorities for improvement with you. They check on the progress made towards achieving these priorities through regular visits to the school. Governors are keen to improve their effectiveness further and welcome opportunities to do so, such as an upcoming review from the local authority.

You have made effective use of support from the local authority to check the accuracy of your evaluation and the quality of your improvement planning. You also value the support your school improvement adviser gives you as a new headteacher and the advice of an experienced headteacher who is acting as a mentor. Leaders and governors have used work within the Priory Partnership to check the accuracy of teachers' assessments and to ensure that arrangements for pupils' transition between schools run smoothly.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and there is a strong safeguarding culture at the school. Leaders make sure that staff and governors receive regular and up-to-date training. Consequently, adults understand clearly their responsibilities for pupils' safety and welfare and are confident to report any concerns that they have. Records of these concerns are carefully maintained. Where appropriate, leaders seek advice promptly from experts outside of the school to make sure individual pupils and families get any extra help that they need.

Pupils say that they are safe and feel safe in school. All parents and staff who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaires agree that this is the case. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe, including when working online. They have a good understanding of what bullying is, in all of its different forms, and the harm it can cause. Pupils say bullying does not occur often. The very large majority of pupils say that when bullying does occur teachers resolve problems swiftly and well.

Governors ensure that safeguarding policies reflect the latest published guidance. The checks required to ensure that adults are suitable to work with pupils are carried out. However, I found administrative errors in the record of these checks that governors had not identified during their scrutiny of safeguarding records. You

took immediate and decisive action to correct these errors.

Inspection findings

- In order to determine whether the school remains good, I followed several lines of enquiry. I considered whether the quality of teaching, learning and assessment was equally effective in all key stages and helping pupils to make good progress. You had identified that pupils achieve consistently well in early years and key stage 1. Despite this positive start, pupils have not always achieved as well in key stage 2, though this was much improved in 2018.
- Children make a good start in the early years. Parents are positive about how quickly their children settle in and make rapid gains in their learning. Pupils continue to make good progress as they move through the school. They are well prepared for the transition to upper school by the time they leave at the end of Year 4.
- Teachers use a consistent approach to planning and assessing learning. You check regularly to see that teachers are using your chosen approaches, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics, and that these are having a positive impact on pupils' learning.
- You have also tightened and revised assessment procedures to make sure teachers regularly and accurately check on pupils' attainment. This helps teachers to identify those pupils who need extra help, either because pupils are falling behind or to maintain their already strong progress. As a result, most pupils currently in the school are making good progress in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics.
- You use your regular checks on the quality of teaching to identify accurately the strengths and areas for improvement, including in individual teachers' practice. Teachers are positive about the training provided and say that they are encouraged to develop their teaching practice. You have rightly identified that assessment in subjects other than English and mathematics is not yet fully developed and ensuring that all pupils make even stronger progress. Similarly, you have identified where teachers can use activities and assessment even more effectively to support pupils' progress. You are taking appropriate actions to iron out these few inconsistencies.
- I also wanted to explore whether teachers have equally high expectations of what pupils can achieve. I particularly focused on the progress made by disadvantaged pupils, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and the most able. This was because challenge for all pupils had been an area for improvement at the previous inspection.
- My observations of learning and scrutiny of pupils' work demonstrated that pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils typically make the same strong progress as other pupils with similar starting points. This is because teachers know individual pupils' needs and barriers to learning and plan accordingly. Additional adults provide effective support for those pupils that they work with, helping pupils to make progress and gain the confidence to do so independently.
- Teachers routinely plan a range of activities that are matched carefully to pupils'

capabilities and provide appropriate stretch and challenge. This is particularly true in English and mathematics. Pupils relish challenge and respond well, making good progress and demonstrating positive attitudes to learning. Teachers make sure that the most able pupils know what they need to do to attain the highest standards in reading, writing and mathematics. This helps the most able pupils to make good progress.

- Teachers do not make sure that this high level of challenge is as consistently present in other subjects. Sometimes they set activities that limit what pupils can achieve and do not let pupils show what they are capable of. Occasionally, teachers could move pupils on to more challenging activities more quickly.
- My final line of enquiry was about whether leaders and governors had maintained the good behaviour and high levels of attendance identified at the previous inspection. This was because published information indicated that rates of exclusion were lower than rates for similar schools, but that absence had increased over recent years and was above the national average for primary schools in 2018.
- Pupils report that behaviour in lessons and around school is good, which reflects my observations during the inspection. Incidents of serious poor behaviour are rare. Pupils understand the system of rewards and consequences and say it has a positive impact on improving behaviour. Pupils are polite, friendly and confident. Their good behaviour contributes to their strong progress.
- You have strengthened procedures to monitor and follow up absence. You meet with parents where you have concerns about attendance to see what help the school can provide. However, you have not shied away from challenging parents when they have not ensured that their children attend regularly. The impact of these actions has yet to be seen and absence and persistent absence currently remain above the most recently published national averages.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- governors monitor leaders' work around safeguarding more closely
- the attendance of pupils who are absent too frequently improves, so that attendance is at least in line with the national average
- they fully establish assessment procedures in subjects other than English and mathematics and use them to consistently provide appropriate stretch and challenge for all 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 Central Bedfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Wilson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and two members of the governing body. I had a telephone conversation with the link governor for safeguarding and the chair of the governing body. I also had a telephone conversation with the local authority's school improvement adviser. I met formally with a group of pupils and spoke to pupils in lessons and at other times to gather their views on the school. I also heard some Year 2 and Year 3 pupils read.

I made short visits to observe learning in all key stages, including the early years, with you. We also scrutinised pupils' work in a range of subjects from Year 2 and Year 4.

I reviewed a range of school documentation and policies, including improvement plans, documentation and records relating to safeguarding, assessment information and documents relating to the work of the governing body.

I also considered 25 responses and free-text comments to Ofsted's online survey for parents, Parent View. I also considered the 18 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 22 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.