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Mrs Rachel Dinnis  
Head of School  
Weston Mill Community Primary Academy  
Ferndale Road  
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Dear Mrs Dinnis

### **Short inspection of Weston Mill Community Primary Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 3 April 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in July 2012.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment three years ago you have secured the school's work and continued the school's strong commitment to its community and families, ensuring that all pupils are safe and learn well. With the support of the executive headteacher and assistant head of school, you have steered the school since it became an academy and are now building strong links across the multi-academy trust to strengthen Weston Mill further. You have continued to ensure that pupils' performance in national tests is broadly at the national average or better and pupils' progress over their time at school is good.

Pupils thrive because of the consistency of practice that is clearly evident in the school. From being welcomed at the door each morning, pupils know that they will be treated with respect by adults. Teachers' consistent approach in classrooms means that behaviour is managed well, pupils are diligent, and their skills and knowledge are built up carefully. You are rightly proud of your inclusive approach to all pupils. There is the flexibility within systems to respond to the needs of individual pupils so that they are valued and learn well.

You have developed a team of leaders who are very reflective, ambitious for pupils and committed to meeting the particular needs of Weston Mill. Many pupils enter school with skill levels lower than those expected for children nationally. Some may lack experiences that would have helped them to develop their knowledge in the classroom. No one uses this as an excuse. Leaders and teachers look for different ways to improve, for example, in vocabulary, speaking, listening and in behaviour

for learning. They work with families to give pupils experiences that are engaging and enriching.

The leadership team has a clear understanding of the strengths and areas of development of the school. Their detailed approach to analysing assessment information means that any child or group of pupils at risk of underachieving is quickly identified and interventions put in place.

Pupils enjoy attending the school. They work well together. They are polite and proud of their school. They know they will be supported to do their best. They understand the school's approaches and are motivated by the different initiatives and awards that encourage them to learn or to behave according to the school's values. They remember memorable events, including book and author days, as well as residential trips to London and Nethercott Farm. Only a few parents responded to Ofsted's Parent View, but nearly all of these would recommend the school to other parents. The school's own parent survey, which had a much higher response rate, shows that parents are very satisfied. Almost all these parents said their child liked school and was making progress.

Joining the multi-academy trust has strengthened the school's capacity. Teachers and leaders work with other schools to share best practice or solve problems together. The trustees and the local advisory board have also strengthened accountability and governance. The local advisory board has a deep understanding of the school. Individual members work across schools so that they can understand challenges, agree actions and follow up. This work is then shared with trustees who use it to assure the quality of the school's work and to inform decisions about improvement planning and finance.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Clear policies and procedures are in place to ensure that safeguarding practice is clear. Any concerns are captured and followed up appropriately. There is effective work with outside agencies when this is required. Leaders and staff are well trained, and this is kept up to date and their understanding regularly checked. Recruitment procedures are well managed and there are appropriate checks on the suitability of staff, governors and volunteers before they are appointed.

Pupils say that they feel safe and their parents agree. A culture of knowing pupils and their family well underpins the school's safeguarding work. You are proactive in supporting pupils. The Hut is a place for pupils to go at breaktimes and lunchtimes if they are lonely or concerned. It is also where pupils have the opportunity to meet with a trusted and trained adult if they need emotional or behavioural support. You and the school's family support worker offer support for families.

### **Inspection findings**

- One of the key lines of enquiry to determine whether the school remained good was to examine how effectively leaders promote high attendance. At the last

inspection, the attendance of pupils was an area for improvement. In the last two years, the absence of pupils was above the national average. More pupils than the national average are persistently absent from school.

- Leaders and governors are very aware of the importance of high attendance and the potential impact on pupils' achievement of missing school. You have very clear systems in place to track and follow up absence. You informally talk with parents at the earliest opportunity and send letters and reminders. You use formal procedures, including court action, when appropriate. You do not authorise holidays in term time, but families still take them. If families are experiencing difficulties bringing their child to school, you will support them. This support might be immediate and involve collecting a child from home. Support might be given by the family support worker who will try to help with more complex social issues that are having an impact on attendance. You have introduced a number of incentives for pupils for high attendance, including class attendance trophies and special rewards. You also strive to make teaching and the curriculum consistently interesting to motivate pupils to attend school.
- In the current academic year, the attendance of pupils is close to the national average. You are particularly proud of the high attendance of children in the early years foundation stage. These children have had the best start, with clear, established expectations and routines. The attendance of Year 6 pupils is also high. These pupils frequently make their way to school independently. Their high attendance is an indication that they are motivated by school. Pupils value the various awards for high attendance. They remember particularly the year when the reward for 100% attendance was a picnic and a water fight. They hope this event will be repeated and they strive to be part of it. You continue to address the persistent absence of a few pupils and this is leading to improvements. You and your local advisory board are very aware that pupils' attendance needs continued focus so that improvements can be maintained.
- Another line of enquiry was how leaders are ensuring that pupils are attaining well in reading, particularly in key stage 2. In the last two years, while attainment in mathematics and writing at the end of year 6 has been above the national average, attainment in reading has been lower.
- It is very clear that, through systematic teaching from the early years, pupils develop the skills to decode effectively and recognise familiar words. Teachers carefully build on this throughout the school so that pupils become more fluent and are able to read books and texts at an age-appropriate level. Leaders carefully track pupils' progress and intervene if any individual or group of pupils is not making sufficient progress. These interventions are successful in remedying particular issues or boosting some pupils' knowledge or confidence.
- You have rightly recognised that deficits in pupils' speaking and listening impede some pupils' development of reading. The development of oracy therefore has a high profile in school. You highlight the importance of adults encouraging pupils to express themselves fluently and grammatically in speech. Some pupils also lack wider reading opportunities and other experiences that impact on their deeper understanding of texts. You therefore promote a love of reading. You support parents reading with their children. You hold author, book days and

storytelling events. You ensure that the curriculum has events that are stimulating and memorable. You have recently adapted the year 6 curriculum so that it is more thematic and enables pupils to develop further their skills of comprehension, evaluation and inference.

- Pupils are very clear about how they are learning to read. They understand the structure and what they must do to get better. They develop fluency through regular practice. Pupils are very confident that adults will help them when they get stuck. They enjoy initiatives, such as reading partners, which provide opportunities to broaden their reading skills. They talk with enthusiasm about all the different activities they have. The emphasis on encouraging pupils to talk about their work and to make connections is stronger in some classes than in others. Some teachers target their questioning carefully and then encourage pupils to develop their ideas. Other pupils are then used to help and challenge ideas. Teachers will refer back to previous learning or the pupils' own experience to ensure that the learning is understood, and key elements are drawn out. This means that the quality of pupils' work is high. In other classes, teachers accept inappropriately short answers in response to general questioning. In such cases, understanding is more superficial.
- The third line of enquiry was to consider whether pupils are challenged enough to reach the higher standard at the end of key stage 2. The percentage of pupils achieving the higher standard is below the national average and has declined since 2016.
- Leaders are deeply committed to ensuring that every pupil makes the best progress they can and are well prepared for secondary school. Middle leaders are knowledgeable and reflective about their work. Their data analysis picks up pupils at risk of underachieving. Teachers are prepared to try out new ideas or projects to support pupils' learning and to encourage them to deepen their knowledge and think creatively. On my visit, pupils were working on a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) project, creating supplies for visiting the moon. The children were very engaged and proud to talk about their engineering books. You have recently adapted the way you teach mathematics so that problem-solving and reasoning are embedded throughout activities.
- Pupils are diligent and engaged but the challenge for the most able is uneven in the school. Too frequently, books show that pupils who are at different starting points do the same work. Adults' questioning is not always targeted enough to challenge the most able pupils. Challenge in lessons is not always precise enough to ensure that most-able pupils remain interested and give their very best. Practice is strongest in mathematics because, in this subject, there are clear examples of different groups being challenged to extend and apply their thinking.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the approaches which the school emphasises for further development of pupils' reading are implemented consistently across the curriculum

- activities and approaches provided for the most able pupils always challenge them to do their very best.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen McShane  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection I met with you, your senior and middle leaders, members of the local advisory board and the CEO of the Discovery multi-academy trust. Together we observed learning in all classrooms and looked at pupils' work. I spoke with a representative group of pupils and with other pupils informally. I scrutinised documentation from the school on a range of matters, including safeguarding. I took account of 20 responses from parents to the Ofsted online survey Parent View and your own parent/carer questionnaire.