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Mrs Sandy Thorpe  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Thorpe

### **Short inspection of Whinney Banks Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 6 June 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 second short inspection carried out since the 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. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Yours is a school that is moving from strength to strength. Pupils and staff are overwhelmingly positive about the quality of education on offer at Whinney Banks. The parents and carers with whom I spoke were full of praise for your staff and your own leadership. They spoke of the high levels of commitment of your staff to the school and how central the school is to the local community. Members of staff are very proud to work at Whinney Banks. Morale is high. They are committed to the pupils in their care and want to make a difference to their lives.

Your school serves a community that includes some of the most economically deprived families in the area. Many children arrive in Nursery and Reception lacking the skills typical for their age. Some are behind in their physical development and their personal and social skills. Several have particularly low starting points in their speaking and listening. During their time with you, children make rapid gains in their development. An increasing proportion finish Reception and start Year 1 'ready to fly' in lessons. As pupils move through key stage 1 and key stage 2, they make rapid progress from their individual starting points in subjects across the curriculum, including reading, writing and mathematics. From low starting points on arrival at

school, pupils leave having reached standards that are above the national average. In 2018, for example, 77% of Year 6 pupils left school having reached the standards expected of them, against the national average of 63%, indicating that they made strong strides in their learning at Whinney Banks. Although the rate of progress that pupils make is strong, the proportions of pupils who reach higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics in national tests are less remarkable. You are aware of this and this forms part of your improvement planning.

Your own leadership is characterised by a strong moral purpose and a determination to improve the life chances of pupils at the school. You work closely with your senior team to spot any areas of the school that need further development. You know your school well and plans for further improvement are sensible and focused. Together, you and your team now have a track record of bringing positive change to the school. Members of the governing body are also effective. They are committed to the school. They both support your work and challenge you to do even better. Members of the governing body bring a wide variety of skills to the role.

Teachers and teaching assistants are determined to ensure that pupils do well. Pupils focus very well on their learning, and teachers note with precision how well they are doing. They check on any misunderstandings that pupils have and help them to catch up when needed. Teachers listen intently to what pupils say in lessons, and they then question them further to deepen their understanding. Professional development has a high priority at school, and teachers are keen to refine their craft.

You are certainly not complacent. Under the direction of the governing body, you have been effective in addressing the areas for improvement noted during the previous inspection. The proportion of children leaving Reception with a level of development that helps them to move smoothly into Year 1 has been increasing year on year. You have been developing strategies to engage boys more in early years and at key stage 1. This is bearing fruit. The progress that they make is strengthening. During the inspection, I was able to see at first hand the way in which boys were being stretched in their learning. They were certainly eager to participate in lessons and to talk to me about their school!

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

There is a culture of safeguarding at school. You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Current checks on the suitability of adults to work with pupils are thorough. Staff training for issues linked to safeguarding is comprehensive. What is more, you keep a close eye on any pupils whose circumstances place them more at risk. You work well with other agencies to keep these pupils safe, and you push hard to get them additional support if it is needed. The work of your family liaison officer is pivotal to this end.

Messages linked to safeguarding are peppered through the curriculum. For example, you place a high priority on helping pupils to navigate the internet and social media

in a safe way. This includes practical hints and tips linked to specific platforms or websites. You have shared this information with parents too through family learning events, which have been well received. Your school is situated near a main road, and you have made sure that road safety messages are routinely shared with the school community.

Pupils are courteous and welcoming. They focus well in class and move sensibly around the building. In lessons, their level of focus is superb. For the few pupils who struggle to behave well, your 'monitoring chart' system is highly effective. Your staff combine praise and rewards with consistently applied rules to help to ensure that pupils behave well. Pupils say that behaviour is very good in and around school. If ever there is an issue with name-calling or unkind behaviour, pupils know who they should speak to. Parents underlined to me how harmonious the school community is. They say that differences are celebrated and tolerance is assumed.

The systems that your attendance team uses to ensure that pupils come to school regularly are organised and efficient. The team is tenacious in ensuring that families know the importance of attendance and punctuality. Rates of attendance have demonstrated an increasing trend for several years. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has decreased. However, you are aware that rates of attendance need to increase further and that persistent absence needs to further reduce.

You have created an environment at school where pupils feel safe to thrive, develop and mature into well-rounded young people. They benefit from extra-curricular clubs, visits, residential trips and outside speakers to enhance their time at school. Policies and procedures, together with your effective curriculum coverage and a focus on respectful behaviour, weave together to help to ensure that pupils are safe at school and learn how to keep themselves safe.

## **Inspection findings**

- As part of the inspection, I wanted to find out how strong provision is in early years and key stage 1. Aspects of these were highlighted at the time of the last inspection. Your focus on ensuring that children in early years are ready to learn is having a positive impact. Over time, children settle very well into school and develop their listening and concentration skills well. Teachers focus on developing children's early writing and early reading skills to good effect. Children's phonics awareness is improving well. During the inspection, I observed children beginning to put simple sentences together with increasing accuracy. For these children, this shows markedly strong progress from their starting points.
- Similarly, in Year 1, I saw pupils concentrating hard on their work. The level of engagement in classrooms is high. Both boys and girls show interest in the tasks given to them by the teacher. Some striking examples of pupils' development of writing was also seen at key stage 1. You have been effective in addressing areas for improvement, as highlighted in the previous inspection report.
- My second area of focus was the extent to which teachers ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make the progress of which

they are capable. You have a team of teachers in place to support pupils with SEND. Together, they accurately identify any pupils with additional needs and ensure that plans are in place to meet these needs. Together, we saw individual class teachers actively ensuring that tasks matched the needs of pupils and that any additional resources required were in place. For example, a pupil with visual impairment was given access to large-print materials, received individual support and was seated correctly in the classroom.

- You have also changed staffing and classes to ensure that pupils with SEND, together with those who need an extra boost, receive it. Your English Learning Zone classes help pupils to focus on basic skills and catch up with their peers. A similar structure is in place for mathematics. Parents appreciate this structure and talked about how effective the additional support is.
- I was interested to examine the teaching of mathematics. The progress that pupils make in this subject has been very strong for several years. Teachers have a good understanding of how pupils make progress in mathematics. They push pupils' thinking forward by setting them problems and making them think through their answers. In doing so, pupils gain a deep understanding of mathematical concepts. Teachers are especially good at spotting misunderstandings and helping pupils to work through them. Pupils of all abilities make especially strong progress in this subject.
- Your website highlights the importance you place on subjects other than English and mathematics and I wanted to see how you ensure that pupils develop their knowledge across the curriculum. Your 'afternoon curriculum' focuses on a wide variety of subjects. Subject coordinators shared with me the standards that pupils are reaching in physical education, geography, French, music and design and technology. Subject leaders are increasingly confident in ensuring that progress is visible in these subjects as pupils move through the school.
- Art, drama and music have a high profile at your school. Pupils talked animatedly about end-of-term assemblies that celebrate their work, and also about other drama productions that take place. Specialist rooms for music, art and design and technology support the teaching of these subjects.
- During the inspection, Year 1 and their parents were working together at a science fair, looking particularly at plants, fruit and vegetables. Pupils were enjoying the fruit salads that were prepared for them and parents were doing their best to label the parts of a flower. There was a sense of purpose and enjoyment during the event. This is an example of one of the ways in which you involve parents at school.
- Although not a focus for this particular inspection, I note the changes that you have made to the teaching of reading. 'Reading journals' are now central to this subject and help pupils to focus on different reading skills, including those of comprehension. I listened to pupils read during the inspection. They are making strong progress in reading and show an interest in different types of books.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- rates of attendance continue to increase, and the proportion of pupils who miss school too frequently reduces further
- a greater proportion of pupils reach higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Wardle  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During this one-day inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders. I spoke with members of the governing body, including the chair. I met with a group of middle leaders and subject coordinators. In addition, I talked to those with responsibility for safeguarding and attendance. I spoke to a group of parents at the beginning of the day, and with two groups of pupils formally. We observed teaching and learning together and discussed what was seen. I reviewed pupils' work from different year groups and from a variety of subjects. I also listened to some pupils read. You presented the school development plan, the school's self-evaluation document and information detailing pupils' progress and attainment. A variety of other documents were also considered, including those relating to safeguarding and policies on the school's website. I considered the 28 responses to the staff questionnaire and the 14 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.