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Mr Courtney Freese  
Headteacher  
The Willows Primary and Nursery School  
Church Road  
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Dear Mr Freese

### **Short inspection of The Willows Primary and Nursery School**

Following my visit to the school on 12 June 2019 with David Piercy, Ofsted Inspector, 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 December 2015.

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

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

The school's core values of 'respect, responsibility, courage, hope, justice, compassion, integrity and wisdom' underpin the work of leaders and staff in the school. Leaders treat personal development and academic success as being equally important. This belief informs leaders', governors' and the trust's vision. Leaders know the school well, including its strengths and areas for development. They have successfully acted to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Most notably, pupils are achieving better standards in key stage 2 mathematics.

Pupils understand and model the school's core values. They are provided with a wide range of learning experiences that encourage them to be creative, think deeply and develop their skills, knowledge and understanding. Pupils are excited by what they are learning and, consequently, are increasingly successful in their learning. For example, following a 'staged' crime scene where the Reception class carpet had gone missing, children exhibited delight and exhilaration as they solved the mystery and explained to the headteacher how they had done so. Across the school, pupils listen to each other and work well together. They understand the high expectations that all staff model and insist on.

Parental responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were

overwhelmingly positive. Parents value your warm and purposeful leadership. They know that you always have the best interests of their children at heart. One parent, speaking for many, said: 'Staff acknowledge children as individuals and cater for them accordingly. The headteacher and all staff are visible and have all clearly built great relationships with the children. Willows is everything and more than anyone could hope for in a school.'

Governors are well informed and seek to improve their own and staff's expertise. They, like all leaders, are determined to continue to improve the school's work to benefit all pupils. Governors are knowledgeable because they have a secure grasp of performance information. They know the strengths and areas of development for the school and are proud of the school and ambitious for its future.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The culture of safeguarding permeates all aspects of school life and ensures that staff act in the best interests of the children. Staff are well trained and knowledgeable about their duties to safeguard pupils in their care. Staff are vigilant and report any concerns about pupils promptly.

The leadership team ensures that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school office manager and other leaders ensure that all checks are completed to make sure that all staff are suitable to work with children. Systems are clear and well thought out. Leaders work well with external agencies. Alongside this work, the school's family support mentors liaise closely with families to provide effective additional support when required.

Leaders provide parents with useful information on the school's website on how to keep their children safe online. Parents overwhelmingly report that when their children are at school they feel that 'they are safe and well looked after'.

Pupils are fully aware of the importance of 'staying safe'. They talk confidently about how they do this in different situations, such as when someone is unkind to them. Pupils say that all adults at the school look after them and they know they can approach any adult for help if they need it.

### **Inspection findings**

- During the inspection, inspectors focused on how leaders were acting to improve pupils' attendance at school. This was because attendance was an area for improvement in the previous inspection. Available pre-inspection information did not provide a convincing picture that attendance was improving rapidly, despite some signs of improvement over time.
- Leaders' work on attendance is thorough and well considered. They have increased the rigour and level of intervention when pupils are absent. Leaders offer high-quality individualised support to families to help them make sure that their children attend well. Consequently, although it remains a challenge and a priority for the school, attendance continues to improve over time. In particular,

the regular attendance of vulnerable groups of pupils has increased considerably.

- Another focus for this inspection was to consider the effectiveness of leadership. Since the previous inspection, The Willows Primary and Nursery School has become an academy. We wanted to explore the differences this has made to secure further improvement. The trust provides effective support and an appropriate level of challenge to ensure that leaders are held to account. For example, they support the school with recruitment and routinely check on aspects of the school such as teaching and learning and safeguarding. Leaders and staff work well with governors and the trust.
- Together, you have created a school community where morale of both staff and pupils is high. Staff access high-quality professional development opportunities, such as the school's focused peer reviews, and are keen to improve the quality of their own practice. The overwhelmingly positive responses to the staff questionnaires demonstrate that staff appreciate the support and opportunities they have. As a result, leaders and staff are all contributing effectively towards improving the school's provision since the previous inspection.
- Leaders, including the trust and governors, understand that the school is on a continuing journey of improvement. However, senior leaders still undertake much of the work. This limits the opportunities that other leaders and staff have to contribute as fully, and evaluatively, to school improvement. As such, this results in steady rather than rapid gains being made in some areas of the school, for example improving outcomes in key stage 1.
- An additional aspect we explored during the inspection was how leaders are securing better outcomes in early years and throughout key stage one, including in phonics. This came about because, while key stage 2 pupil outcomes are strong, they are not consistently so in early years and key stage 1.
- Children start school with skills and abilities slightly below those typically seen in children of their age. Continued improvements in the quality of provision from Nursery through to Reception are securing consistently positive outcomes in early years. The transition from early years to key stage 1 is thoughtful and considers the needs of children carefully. The shared work of the early years and key stage 1 leader is contributing towards preparing children well for their move from early years to Year 1.
- Leaders' focus on improving phonics teaching and learning is widespread throughout key stage 1. Phonics is taught frequently and staff understand the importance for all pupils to be able to read fluently. During the inspection, Year 1 and 2 pupils confidently used their phonics knowledge to attempt words such as 'innovate' and 'wardrobe', using their blending and segmenting skills accurately. Furthermore, a love of reading is promoted, and this is leading to pupils having opportunities to apply their phonics knowledge and understanding to the texts they read.
- Although leaders are continuing to prioritise improving the outcomes for key stage 1 pupils, the pace of improvement is slower than in other areas of the school. Despite insightful leadership in key stage 1, the quality of teaching and learning is not yet consistently strong enough to secure the swifter improvements required for key stage 1 pupils to achieve better outcomes and make more

consistent progress from early years through to key stage 2.

- Inspectors also reviewed how effectively pupil premium funding is being used to secure better outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders ensure that the pupil premium funding is carefully spent to deploy staff and resources to meet disadvantaged pupils' needs. For example, well-planned small phonics groups and family support workers' time ensure that disadvantaged pupils are able to access their learning successfully. Leaders use the funding creatively and ensure that disadvantaged pupils are confident and contribute fully to school life and the community.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- leaders at all levels are provided with more opportunities to contribute to school improvement and know the difference that their work makes to improving the school's performance
- the quality of teaching and learning is of a consistently high quality so that, from their starting points, key stage 1 pupils' outcomes improve more rapidly.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracy Fielding  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, both inspectors looked at specific aspects of the school's work, including leadership, the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school, and safeguarding arrangements, including attendance. Additionally, inspectors met with the headteacher and the deputy headteacher to discuss the key lines of enquiry.

The lead inspector also met with the early years leader, the key stage 1 leader, the chief executive officer (CEO) of Berlesduna Trust and the chair of the governing body. The team inspector met with the assistant headteacher, the pupil premium leader and a group of pupils.

We considered 34 responses from parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 29 free-text comments. Inspectors also took into account 56 paper responses

to the staff survey. While no pupils completed the pupil survey, inspectors spoke to pupils when they visited classrooms and met with a group of pupils to discuss their school experience. Both inspectors visited classes accompanied by the headteacher and deputy headteacher in the Nursery class, Reception, key stage 1 and key stage 2, and looked at examples of pupils' work.