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9 February 2017

Mrs Michelle Masters
Headteacher
Willow Bank Infant School
Duffield Road
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Dear Mrs Masters

Short inspection of Willow Bank Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 25 January 2017, 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 March 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Outcomes at the end of the early years and at the end of key stage 1 are well above national figures. Results of the Year 1 phonics screening check are also well above national expectations.

Since you started at the school in September 2016, the raising of standards for all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, has been a clear priority for you and your newly formed leadership team. You have a very clear vision for the school and, together with your leadership team, you are making rapid and necessary changes.

You fully understand the areas for development within the school. You have strategic plans and current actions in place to address and improve them.

Around the school and in classrooms, pupils care about each other and feel safe. You have developed an ethos and culture of nurturing pupils throughout the school and have further plans in place to extend this. As one parent commented: 'It is an extremely nurturing school, and it is very clear that the needs of each individual child are a priority.' Pupils are very proud of their school and of the work they do. Pupils are polite and friendly, and enjoy talking about their learning.

The vast majority of parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, were extremely positive about the school and would recommend it to others. A parent commented that: 'This is an amazing school and the teachers my child has had have been engaging, inspiring and all-round great at what they do.'

You have implemented a new assessment and tracking system that allows you and your leadership team to see how well pupils are progressing. Your careful analysis of this information fully informs planning and provision of support for pupils so that they make at least expected progress. The leadership team carries out thorough monitoring across the school. It holds regular meetings with staff to track individual pupils' progress and to make any necessary adjustments to the support provided. You work well with other local schools to agree your assessments of pupils' learning.

The leadership of the school was asked at the last inspection to provide a succinct and easily understood overview of the performance of individuals and groups to help inform self-evaluation and strategic planning. You have worked to develop a new assessment system to meet this need. Following your evaluation of this system, you are now refining it to fully develop its impact.

Your self-evaluation is accurate, you know what needs to be improved and have detailed plans and actions in place. Your use of the recently introduced assessment system needs ongoing refinement to ensure that it supports all pupils in making rapid progress from their different starting points. This would help more pupils to learn to a greater depth across their subjects. You and your leadership team have the capacity and knowledge to move the school forward successfully with these priorities.

The leadership team is supported well by the governing body. Governors focus on what matters and visit the school regularly. They provide a good level of challenge and support to school leaders.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils' well-being is central to the life of the school. As one parent wrote: 'We have felt confident our children have been well looked after and cared for whilst at school.' Leaders work closely with families to support any pupil whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Your work on addressing absence rates has been highly effective in increasing attendance of pupils who were previously identified as persistent absentees.

Staff have an up-to-date knowledge of current safeguarding requirements and have received recent training. They are vigilant about the risks posed to children and know how to report any concerns they may have.

Pupils across the school have learned about what bullying is and know what to do if they ever feel worried or concerned about their own safety, or that of others. Pupils report that bullying rarely happens and that they are confident that adults in the school deal effectively with these rare occurrences.

Leaders make sure safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Governors check carefully to make sure safeguarding arrangements are effective and that records are of a high quality.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, I focused, in particular, on the following aspects of the school: the effectiveness of the school's work to keep pupils safe; how well pupils, particularly girls and the most able pupils, achieve and make progress in key stage 1; how leaders are ensuring that outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, including those identified and supported by the school, are improving; how effectively leaders analyse assessment information; and the effectiveness of governance.
- You are developing a culture of very high expectations in all aspects and areas of the school. Working together with other leaders and governors, you have identified the right priorities for improvement and have the correct actions and plans in place to achieve them. The local authority has worked with the governing body to establish strong leadership for the school and fully supports the decisions you are making to improve the school.
- You have identified mathematics as an area for development across the school and you have well-considered plans and actions in place to bring outcomes in this subject in line with other subjects.
- Pupils, including the disadvantaged, persevere and use their phonics knowledge to make sense of texts. They enjoy reading the wide range of books that they can access in the school library. They engage enthusiastically in reading generally and are making good progress.
- Pupils have many and varied opportunities to write. Their talk with partners about their writing helps them develop their skills and understanding. Good progress is apparent from the work in their writing books. The new handwriting scheme, introduced in September 2016, is quickly helping pupils to develop their skills towards forming joined script. Good progress in handwriting skills was also clear in pupils' books.
- Pupils enjoy their learning and share equal access to a wide range of useful resources. They are proud of their work and keen to share the progress that they are making with others.
- You have identified that the skills required for pupils to achieve a greater depth of understanding need to be developed and consolidated and have clear plans to address this.
- You and your leadership team analyse carefully how well individual pupils and groups are progressing. The leadership team uses this information effectively to plan appropriate support and teaching to enable pupils who are falling behind to catch up. You are training staff and providing opportunities, such as working alongside teachers in other schools, to ensure that teachers' judgements become increasingly accurate.
- Your decision to provide additional learning support to assist you in your work with pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is proving successful, both for teaching staff and for pupils. Attendance for this group of pupils has been low in the past, but you have taken swift and effective action to address this. The measures you have introduced are having a significant impact on reducing the number of children currently identified as persistent absentees.
- Disadvantaged pupils are currently making good progress in their learning. The

pupil premium grant is being used effectively to provide good-quality support to help them accelerate their progress. Consequently, they have a positive attitude towards learning, are keen to participate in lessons, and enjoy reading.

- Governors have put resources and funding in place to help a significant number of children across the school who you have identified as being in need of additional support but who do not receive additional funding in other forms. This strategy is proving effective to ensure that all pupils have the support they need to make expected or more than expected progress.
- The leadership team is well supported and challenged by the governing body. Governors are dedicated to the school and their support is recognised and appreciated by staff. Governors have a clear understanding of the needs of the school and have planned a strategic direction for future development. Governing body committees' work is focused appropriately. Governors understand their statutory duties and recognise the need to update some information on the school website.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the assessment system is developed to ensure its accuracy, so that it fully informs what needs to be done to provide appropriate next steps for all pupils
- more pupils develop the necessary skills to achieve a greater depth in their learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Marcia Goodwin
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your leadership team, teachers, other members of staff, pupils, seven members of the governing body (including the acting chair), and a representative of the local authority to discuss various aspects of the school's work. We visited a number of lessons together, and scrutinised a range of pupils' work. I listened to disadvantaged pupils from Years 1 and 2 read. I talked to pupils about their learning and looked at their books with them. I took account of 75 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including information about pupils' achievement, records of leaders' checks on the quality of teaching, the school development plan, safeguarding checks, policies and procedures, and attendance information. I discussed with you your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness.