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Mr Richard Kieran
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Dear Mr Kieran

Short inspection of Woodrow First School

Following my visit to the school on 18 December 2018, 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 October 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, your staff and governors have worked relentlessly to ensure that pupils make good progress and are well prepared for the next stage of their education when they leave Year 4. This has been a challenge for you, due to the low starting points of the children on entry to the early years of learning. In addition, you have used the analysis of the pupils' performance information to address the different barriers to learning that many of them present.

Your drive and high expectations have paid off. Year-on-year standards have risen. In 2018, by the end of Year 2, a large proportion of pupils achieved the expected standard in writing and mathematics and increased numbers of pupils achieved the expected standard in reading. This is testimony to your ambitious leadership, which requires teachers to place a high emphasis on teaching skills of reading, writing and mathematics.

You are tenacious in seeking out creative approaches that engage pupils in 'real life' learning situations. You and your staff have designed a curriculum approach that uses drama and imaginary experiences to 'hook' pupils into learning. Your work on curriculum design is highly regarded, and this has had a very positive effect on raising aspirations in the community.

Parents are delighted with what the school offers their children. One parent, speaking for many, said, 'This school is like the family you never had.' Parents are

very appreciative of the help you offer them, especially the workshops on how to support their children's learning at home.

Staff are very supportive of your vision and they value the opportunities that you give them to work alongside professional artists and leaders in the field of drama in education. You have created a learning community where teachers are keen to learn from one another and seek best practice. As a result, this has created high levels of enthusiasm among pupils, who willingly give up their Saturdays. Pupils develop and share their learning with visitors, who are interested in seeing how they learn through the medium of drama.

At the time of the last inspection you were asked to increase the opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills both in poetry and stories. You placed particular emphasis on developing pupils' skills of writing for multiple audiences. As a result, standards in writing have improved. For example, when studying the poem 'Attack' by Siegfried Sassoon, pupils in Year 4 conveyed a strong sense of the fear experienced by soldiers when going into battle. You have correctly identified that consistently tackling errors in their spellings will also improve the presentation of some pupils' work.

You were also asked to set more demanding work for the most able pupils. Leaders have developed a clear structure to give pupils different levels of challenge. However, teachers do not yet consistently provide some of the most able pupils, including disadvantaged boys, with work that challenges them sufficiently. While the most able pupils are, in general, now making better progress, it is not as strong as it could be, and does not enable these groups to achieve as highly as they should in reading and writing.

Safeguarding is effective.

A strong culture of safeguarding permeates the school. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and governors meticulously undertake spot checks. For example, they routinely question staff about their knowledge of appropriate procedures to follow when a pupil's welfare might be at risk.

Pupils know whom to go to for help should they require an adult to talk to. Concerns are taken very seriously. All information is stored and communicated effectively.

The school works very well with a number of outside agencies, especially the educational psychologist, speech and language therapist and play therapist.

The school has good links with the police and is kept abreast of any issues facing the community. Pupils are adamant that there is no bullying and that everyone respects one another's differences in a safe learning environment. Parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, are unanimous in their view that the school keeps their children safe.

Inspection findings

- You identified a whole-school need to raise the number of pupils reaching the expected standards by the end of Year 2. You and your senior leaders implemented a programme of professional development, which has ensured that staff with subject responsibilities are well informed of new developments. In 2018, a large proportion of pupils attained the national expectations for their age in mathematics. Staff training on developing pupils' mathematics reasoning and problem-solving skills has had a positive impact on boys' and disadvantaged pupils' progress. As a result, increased numbers of pupils are now working at greater depth in mathematics.
- The strength of this professional development programme has resulted in an improvement in the proportions of pupils achieving the expected standards in reading. In addition, a large proportion of pupils achieved the expected standard in writing. Work in books and the school's performance information show that the large majority of pupils, including the most able, are making good progress across the curriculum. However, the most able pupils, including disadvantaged boys, are not making sufficient progress to attain greater depth in reading and writing.
- In science, boys and disadvantaged pupils are making greater progress in their learning. Pupils are working scientifically by examining evidence and testing its validity. For example, when examining the work of the Victorian civil engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel, pupils explored materials that could be used to prevent a breach of the river Thames.
- Outcomes for boys are improving because of the focus on topics that interest them, such as learning how to be ethical builders who protect animals in a nature park. When designing the park, boys were given plenty of opportunities to write to the council warning them of the perils that animals face. This had a very positive impact on their personal, social and emotional development because it helped to develop their skills of empathy for the plight of animals.
- During our joint observations of the teaching of phonics, we noted that pupils were engaged and making good use of their phonics knowledge. For example, several boys with low prior attainment and several disadvantaged pupils used this knowledge well to read unfamiliar words. The development of these skills is also helping pupils improve their writing skills.
- We looked at outcomes in the early years, which are improving year on year. However, we noted that some children struggled with forming their letters correctly. This was due to missed opportunities for modelling by staff in play activities.
- In the past, some disadvantaged pupils had low attendance, which had a negative impact on their achievement. The attendance of current disadvantaged pupils is now in line with the national average.
- The school is effective in dealing with pupils who have behavioural difficulties. The poor behaviour of some pupils has led to occasional fixed-term exclusions. However, the school's effective support and guidance has brought about a marked improvement in the behaviour of these pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to spell difficult words correctly and ensure that pupils present their work neatly
- more emphasis is placed in lessons on ensuring that a greater proportion of more-able pupils, including disadvantaged boys, work in greater depth in reading and writing
- increased opportunities are provided for children in the early years to form their letters correctly in play activities.

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

Yours sincerely

Dr Bogusia Matusiak-Varley
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection I held meetings with you and other leaders. I met with five governors. I spoke to pupils formally and informally. I made short visits, with you, to classes in each year group and I looked at a range of pupils' books. I spoke to four parents and carers at the start of the school day and considered the 30 responses to Parent View and the 16 responses to the staff survey.

I scrutinised various documents, including the school's development plan, the self-evaluation of the school's performance and the recent assessments of pupils' attainment and progress. I reviewed the portfolios of evidence kept to document learning using drama as a stimulus. We discussed the national test results and the results of assessments undertaken by pupils in 2016 and 2017.

I also considered information published on the school's website, information about attendance, behaviour and safety, and information on pupil premium spending.