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Mrs Gina Yoxall
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Yoxall

Short inspection of Woolaston Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 31 October 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 2013.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Since your appointment in January 2017, you have brought much needed stability during a turbulent period for the school. Without exception, pupils and staff agree that the school has improved considerably under your leadership. Staff morale is high. Staff appreciate your openness and the focus on their well-being and continued professional development.

A kind and caring ethos permeates the school. Pupils are well behaved and polite, including during their breaktimes and lunchtimes. They appreciate what teachers do for them and talk enthusiastically about how learning is becoming more engaging and is increasing their motivation to do well. Pupils welcome the enrichment activities and trips that you provide to enhance their learning further. A real favourite with key stage 2 pupils is the visit to 'Noah's Ark'. Pupils speak highly of how this visit developed their understanding of the different environments that animals live in. They also say how much they enjoy the wider sporting opportunities that the school now provides, such as archery.

Parents spoke to me about how the changes you have initiated have impacted positively on their children's education. They recognise the quality of your leadership and the recent improvements that you and the staff have made. They are keen for these to continue.

Following the previous inspection, leaders were charged with improving pupils' achievement in mathematics. Over time, achievement has been steadily rising and attainment is now in line with the national average. This is because teachers plan work that matches pupils' needs and, as a result, pupils are attentive, focused and clearly enjoying their learning.

Additionally, leaders were tasked with strengthening the impact of middle leadership. Until your appointment, the impact of middle leaders to lead improvement was limited. Middle leaders now work closely with staff and subject-specific link governors so that all are clear about the developments needed to improve teaching and pupils' outcomes. All recognise that further work is required to ensure that planned actions lead to improvement.

Although an improvement on the previous year, you were disappointed with the progress pupils made in reading at the end of Year 6. You and your leadership team immediately devised strategic plans to improve the quality of teaching across the school. You recognise that actions are having an impact on pupils' outcomes, but that there is more to do to secure effective teaching across the school.

At the time of the previous inspection, governors did not have the skills required to hold school leaders to account. However, following advice from the local authority, governors commissioned a review and reorganised their roles and responsibilities. As a result, governors have undertaken training to improve their skills and develop their knowledge. Consequently, the governing body is growing in capacity and there are early signs that governors are beginning to have a positive impact on the overall effectiveness of the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Appropriate safeguarding training ensures that staff are knowledgeable and know how to respond should they have any concerns surrounding pupils' welfare. The school works effectively with a range of external agencies to ensure that pupils are safe. Your office staff are tenacious in making sure that records are well kept, and they follow up any concerns swiftly, particularly when pupils are absent from school.

Governors have a strong oversight of safeguarding. They make sure that all adults are checked to confirm that they are fit to work with children. The governor responsible for safeguarding regularly visits the school to check that systems are effective, and that concerns have been followed up adequately.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed several lines of enquiry. Your self-evaluation and improvement plans identify the correct priorities for improving the school. You know your school well and are accurate in your judgement of what needs to be improved further.

- The first line of enquiry that we looked at considered pupils' attendance, including that of pupils who are persistently absent. You and your staff have made significant impact on improving attendance. A number of successful initiatives have been implemented and, for the first time in several years, pupils' absence rates are now in line with the national average. Although attendance continues to be a challenge, most parents do now make sure that their children attend school regularly. You and your governors took decisive action not to sanction holidays during term time. However, a small minority of parents are still reluctant to heed your advice.
- My next focus was on the teaching of phonics. Although rising, outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check have been below the national average since 2016. You acted to change the school's approach to the teaching of phonics and have introduced a different phonics programme to address this. Teachers and support staff have received recent training and guidance to develop their practice. The new approach is not yet embedded across the school. For example, in sessions we observed together, pupils were not being corrected for inaccurate pronunciation of individual sounds. This was hindering their progress in early reading and writing development. You have rightly identified strengthening teachers' subject knowledge and developing the organisation of the environment in which phonics is being taught to support further improvement.
- We also looked at reading in key stage 2. In recent years, pupils' progress in reading has been weaker than the progress pupils make in writing and mathematics. More recently, the school has started to work on reading initiatives in close partnership with the local authority. However, pupils' reading skills are not improving quickly enough. This is because the teaching of reading does not help pupils develop the skills that they require to be able to read effectively. At times, teachers do not plan tasks that develop pupils' aptitude for reading in sufficient depth.
- My final line of enquiry was to establish whether leaders have maintained improvements in writing across key stage 2, and how effectively the most able pupils are being challenged to achieve their very best. Current pupils demonstrate that, over time, they have learned a range of appropriate skills that they can apply when writing in different situations. Pupils' books demonstrate that they are making progress, particularly in their sentence structure and composition work. Where this is most effective, pupils have enhanced the accuracy of their writing further by using more imaginative vocabulary. While many pupils have strengthened the quality of their writing, the application of more advanced technical writing skills is not as strong. For example, when applying more complex punctuation, Year 6 pupils do not demonstrate the level of accuracy expected for the higher standards.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- governors continue to develop their roles further so that they are knowledgeable and more able to hold leaders to account through effective challenge

- middle leaders develop their skills further so that they have greater impact on raising pupils' achievement
- teachers' subject knowledge of synthetic phonics is accurate and a systematic approach to the teaching of phonics is implemented by all staff
- teachers challenge pupils to use more advanced grammar and punctuation skills so that pupils can achieve the higher standards in their writing
- they implement a clear strategic approach to the teaching of reading across key stage 2 so that pupils are provided with the skills necessary to be able to read effectively.

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

Yours sincerely

Matt Middlemore
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, members of your leadership team and governing body, and the local school improvement adviser from the local authority. I discussed the work of the school, including the processes and procedures in place for safeguarding. Together, we observed teaching in classes, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at the work in their books. I met with a group of pupils to gather their views about school, to determine if they felt safe and to determine the typicality of behaviour.

I looked at a range of school documents, including the school's self-evaluation and most recent development plan. I took account of the 23 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the free-text responses from parents. I also considered the 14 responses to the staff survey and eight responses to the pupil survey.