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Mrs Lisa Duncan
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Dear Mrs. Duncan

Short inspection of Whitwell Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 March 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 first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in June 2015.

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.**

Whitwell is a popular school. Parents and carers value the encouraging ethos of the school. As one parent commented, 'I think the school does its best for children.'

Pupils can explain the importance of respect and acceptance, which the school holds at the heart of its values. You have developed positive relationships with the wider community. Pupils say that they feel proud to participate in fundraising activities for local and national charities.

Pupils are polite, confident and articulate. They appreciate visits, especially residential visits, and wider opportunities to stimulate their interest, particularly through sport and drama. They enjoy the responsibility of contributing to the smooth running of the school through their work as mini-leaders, fostering friendship groups at playtimes and organising structured games. The school council has been influential in improving the range of play equipment available for the pupils to use.

Pupils say that they enjoy the curriculum and their learning. However, they would like to learn more in science and in religious education. Older pupils say that they

relish the challenges teachers set for them but on occasions they find the work too easy. Some pupils expressed concern at low-level disruption in some classes. When the expectations of teachers are high, pupils respond positively.

You have an enthusiastic and committed staff and you work closely with your team of senior and middle leaders to continue to improve the school. You are developing your staff and leadership team through professional development. You share good practice and training opportunities with local schools.

You have identified priorities for improvement and the senior and middle leaders collect information to check the progress of most groups of pupils. However, leaders do not exercise the necessary skills to ensure that they can use a range of evidence to assess the quality of teaching and learning accurately. As a consequence, there are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching.

Initiatives relating to mathematics and reading are underdeveloped and are not equally effective across the school. The systems of assessment, appropriate staff development and accountability for pupils' progress lack clarity and cohesion. Progress in reading and in mathematics, by the end of key stage 2, was in the bottom 20% of schools in 2016 and 2018.

Governors bring a range of experiences to their roles. The governing body has ensured that governors are well trained and receive professional development. They are knowledgeable about the school's priorities. However, your current evaluation of the school's work does not fully reflect where improvements to teaching still need to be made and the governing body cannot form a reliable picture of whether targets are likely to be achieved.

During the tour of the school, part of which we conducted together, it was noted that tasks did not always match the ability of different pupils and provide sufficient challenge for some groups of pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school's business officer ensures that all checks on staff, volunteers and visitors meet statutory requirements. Your record-keeping is well organised and records are kept securely. Policies are reviewed and updated regularly. Systems for recruitment are rigorous. Senior leaders ensure that appropriate checks are carried out when appointing new members of staff.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding, where all staff know their roles and responsibilities. Staff and governors are well trained. Your records show that you respond to any concerns swiftly and have an understanding of the procedures for referring pupils to other agencies when appropriate.

Pupils feel safe and receive regular reminders about keeping safe online. Parents spoken to, and most of those who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent

View, agreed that their children are happy at school and feel secure. Pupils understand the forms that bullying can take and say that, while it is rare, staff would help them if they were worried. One pupil said, 'Where there are issues – the odd, silly thing – they are dealt with effectively.' However, they did express their concerns that poor behaviour in some lessons affects their learning.

Inspection findings

- Children enter Reception with skills that are broadly typical for their age. The proportion of children who achieve a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year is higher than the national average. The proportion of pupils who achieve the expected standard in reading and writing at the end of Year 2 is above the national average. The proportion who achieve at greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 is above the national average. However, published data shows that progress in reading and in mathematics at the end of Year 6 is lower than in most schools.
- Too few middle and higher-achieving pupils make the progress of which they are capable in reading and in mathematics. Assessment is not being used well enough to identify pupils' knowledge and gaps in their knowledge to ensure that work is appropriately set. Pupils who have the capacity to reach the expected or higher standard are not being given the opportunity to practise and develop their skills in mathematics and reading sufficiently.
- In reading, pupils' books showed an emerging approach to teaching reading for meaning. Older pupils were practising skills of retrieving literal information, annotating texts and making improvements to an extract text by changing isolated words. Inconsistencies in teaching, coupled with low expectations of some groups of pupils, resulted in a proportion of the work set not being well matched to the capabilities of the pupils. The use of extracts over time is limiting higher-order thinking and progress for a proportion of pupils is slow.
- I visited a phonics lesson in Reception. You have recently introduced a new programme to help adults deliver phonics in a consistent way across the early years foundation stage and key stage 1. This is showing positive results, with a large majority of pupils making swift progress. In key stage 2, some pupils make good use of what they have learned when they read unfamiliar words in a text.
- A reading initiative is being developed across the school. Books are more effectively matched to the skills of the reader. The choice of reading books has been extended and there is evidence of reading being regularly monitored. This is at an early stage and the impact on pupils' progress in comprehension is not fully evaluated. Pupils say that they enjoy reading.
- As part of improving mathematics teaching, you have been integrating systems for a whole-school approach. This is yet to be fully embedded and its impact measured. Pupils' books showed an inconsistency in teachers' expectations of pupils. An over-reliance on generic questions limited opportunities for teaching to be effective and for the higher-achieving groups to make the rate of progress of which they are capable.

- Not all teachers in key stage 2 discuss pupils' thinking with them well enough. There are limited opportunities for pupils to explore and express their reasoning in an age-appropriate and logical manner. Pupils' skills in understanding questions, reasoning and applying their mathematical understanding to solving problems are underdeveloped. Books show that the more able pupils make slow progress because they sometimes have to complete work that is too easy for them before they move on to tasks that challenge their thinking.
- Where lessons are not planned effectively, some pupils lose interest and behave in a way that interrupts the learning of others. This is not always dealt with effectively.
- Discussions with subject leaders highlighted that they need more time to further develop their skills to use information from their monitoring activities effectively. The school is developing its assessment system to ensure that it provides relevant progress information for teachers and leaders. This, alongside monitoring activities, should enable leaders to have a comprehensive view of progress across the school for all pupil groups.
- Pupils' attendance has been close to or below the national average for the past three years, with persistent absence above the national average for the past three years. Currently, there is a 1% increase in absence and a 4% increase in persistent absence compared with the end point in 2018. Leaders and governors are tackling this robustly but some parents keep their children away from school for extended periods with little good reason. Leaders understand that constant vigilance is required to ensure that pupils' attendance improves.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- subject leaders develop their skills further so that they can improve the quality of teaching and outcomes in their areas of responsibility
- they ensure that teachers adapt learning tasks consistently so that a high proportion of all pupils make faster progress in reading and mathematics in key stage 2
- the behaviour of some pupils that interrupts learning is dealt with quickly and effectively
- they continue to work with parents and enlist their support in improving pupils' attendance.

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

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Moore
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I had meetings with you and I also met with five governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke with parents before school and with a group of pupils about their experience. I visited all classes, some with you and others with the deputy headteacher. Together, we looked at a sample of pupils' books. In addition, I checked the school's safeguarding arrangements and records, including the school's record of recruitment checks on staff. I checked the school's records on behaviour and pupils' attendance to date and reviewed the school's analysis of pupils' absence. I evaluated the assessment information held by the school, the school's self-evaluation and its current school improvement plan. I took account of the 48 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and reviewed the 20 responses to the staff questionnaire. There were no responses from children to the online survey.