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7 November 2016

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Dear Mrs Hubbard-Whitehead

### **Short inspection of Witnesham Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 11 October 2016, 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 school was judged to be good in October 2011.

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

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

There have been some changes to both leadership and staffing, particularly in the last two years. In April 2014, the school federated with a local primary school and there is now one governing body for both schools. You are supported by a deputy headteacher who leads the school when you are not on-site. There are also two other leaders who ably support the school. A long-standing teacher retired in the summer term and you took the opportunity to employ a newly qualified teacher for the beginning of September. That said, staffing has remained fairly consistent over the course of the last five years.

In 2014 and 2015, pupils at the end of key stage 2 achieved at least in line with national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. Not enough pupils have historically achieved the higher levels, however, and this remains applicable to pupils at the end of key stage 1. You recognise that there are some small groups of pupils who could do better. In 2016, Year 6 pupils did not make as much progress in writing as those nationally. This was particularly so for middle attaining pupils which was the largest group in this year.

In Spring 2015, you introduced the new assessment procedures currently in the school. It is accepted that this new system is still developing and that, although

teachers are using it well, they are sometimes cautious in their judgements. This has caused you some consternation as it means that the pupil tracking does not yet fully match what you see in pupils' books. However, it was evident during the book scrutiny that your subject leaders and I did during the inspection, that pupils are largely making at least, if not better than, expected progress in writing. There are, however, not always enough opportunities for children to write at length and to regularly practise the basic skills in English that they need to be successful writers. In mathematics, while most pupils make at least expected progress, the most able pupils in particular are often given tasks that do not extend their learning. Some pupils told me that mathematics is 'too easy' for them and that they don't always receive regular feedback on their work.

The leaders of English and mathematics are developing well their understanding of the part they play in whole-school monitoring and evaluation. They have good subject knowledge and high expectations for the pupils. However, the regular monitoring and incisive use of all available assessment information is not yet consistently developed. As a result, leaders do not always focus clearly on emerging priorities. The school has identified mathematics as an area for development but as yet there is no action plan in place. This does not set a good example for the other emerging leaders in the school who currently complete a review of their responsibilities for governors. Along with the school's overall development plan, subject leaders' action plans are insufficiently tightly focused on pupils' progress, and are not evaluated regularly. Governors make frequent visits to the school to check on its work. However, by sharpening the school's development plans, governors will have a clearer picture of what it is they are monitoring and evaluating. Consequently, they will be better able to hold leaders to account for actions they have taken and the impact each action has on pupils' outcomes.

In the previous report, the school was asked to raise attainment in writing. You set about putting in place a variety of actions. Every available opportunity to develop speaking and listening was explored. For example, pupils are regularly encouraged to listen and respond to questions in class assemblies, and they are asked about what they are proud of in celebration assemblies. In the new national curriculum you have placed a strong emphasis on pupils presenting their work to a range of audiences. For example, pupils do their own presentations in class and other pupils are expected to highlight two points they like about their classmates' work. Pupils also present to the governing body and parents, and even speak publicly to the parish council. As a result, pupils are confident and articulate.

You have sought training in the systematic teaching of phonics, grammar, punctuation and spelling from local providers and the local authority. All adults are now confident in how to teach phonics. As a result, the proportion of Year 1 pupils who achieved the expected standard in the phonics check has been above the national average for the last three years. Pupils are not only confidently using their phonic skills in their reading, but also in their writing. Visiting authors and the use of class novels have ensured that pupils love reading. Commenting on their reading habits they said, 'It's better than when you watch television, because you don't get all the information like you get from a book'. All of this work has contributed to a

good range of writing across the school. As you predicted, the influence these activities have had on pupils' writing is clearly evident. At the end of key stages 1 and 2, pupils' attainment, including those who are disadvantaged, has been above the national average for the last three years. In 2015, the proportion of pupils who attained the higher levels at key stage 1 was also above the national average. During my visit, your senior leaders and I looked at pupils' writing in their books from the last academic year and from September this year. In the vast majority of cases, pupils made good progress from their varying starting points. Teachers plan for many types of writing, some stimulated by class novels. Today, for example, we saw older pupils responding very enthusiastically to a carefully selected diary entry from children evacuated in the second world war. High-quality discussion then ensued about how these children might be feeling. 'They've got to be homesick, haven't they?' said one pupil.

You have effectively introduced the new curriculum to ensure that pupils have a wider understanding of different cultures, beliefs and religions. Pupils love the 'wow days' that you have introduced and clearly benefit greatly from those experiences. For example, you recently celebrated World Language Day. Each class chose a country and dressed up in representative clothes, explaining why they had chosen that particular country. Pupils and parents alike enjoyed cooking from Holland, the making of simple sushi, and an introduction to Brazilian samba dancing. The school's walls are adorned with art work representative of a wide range of countries and cultures – from 'hot and cold regions' to the Gambia, Egyptian printing and models of Anderson shelters. One parent commented, 'There is a wealth of activities that my children enjoy participating in.' As a result of all of this work, pupils have developed a very good understanding of their place in the local community and understand well how others live in a variety of other cultures.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

All safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements. School leaders and governors ensure that robust procedures for the safety and well-being of all pupils are applied with rigour. Training for all staff and governors in safeguarding is regular and fully up to date, including good induction for new members of staff.

You and your deputy headteacher have joint responsibility for child protection. As headteacher, you know the pupils well and work closely with staff from other agencies when any safeguarding concerns arise. Records related to child protection are maintained well. The progress of the most vulnerable pupils is monitored closely to ensure that their needs are fully met. As special educational needs coordinator, you ensure that the best possible support is available for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. There is good evidence of individual pupils' support and the impact this has had on pupils' welfare. Supported by your governors, you have been relentless in the pursuit of good attendance, issuing penalty notices to families when this is not the case. As a result, the attendance of pupils, including the most vulnerable pupils, improved from 2014 to 2015.

Pupils say that they like to come to this 'amazing school'. They feel very safe in their

'kind' school and, should they have any concerns, they know who to go to. They know that bullying 'is where someone picks on you a lot and is nasty'. However, they also say that any incidents of bullying are very rare and if they do happen they are quickly dealt with. All adults have high expectations of good behaviour. As a result, behaviour is a strength in the school. Pupils are courteous, respectful of one another, and are pleased to acknowledge other pupils' achievements. In the Reception class during my visit, one child congratulated the other on matching the right sounds to pictures saying 'Wow! Well done!' The vast majority of parents who responded to Parent View said that their children are happy, safe and enjoy coming to school. One comment, among many, was, 'Witnesham has nurtured our children to love school and to feel confident about themselves.' Inspection evidence confirms this to be so.

The school's website is largely compliant. The special educational needs annual report has not yet been uploaded. However, during my visit I was able to evidence that this statutory aspect of the school's work is subsumed within other documentation in the school. Almost all policies are also up to date and reflect the latest legislation. Some, however, are awaiting review at the first governing body meeting for the autumn term.

Governors are experienced and astute. They have sensibly engaged effective support from the local authority to ensure that pupils' standards in writing continue to improve. Governors value the local authority governor services. Many have willingly embarked on training to enhance their skills so that they are better able to challenge leaders. An external consultant is employed by the governing body to support governors in the headteacher's performance management process.

## **Inspection findings**

- Over time, pupils at the end of key stage 2 make good progress from their starting points. This includes the most able pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those pupils who are disadvantaged, including the most able disadvantaged. In 2014 and 2015, the proportion making the progress expected of pupils their age was above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion exceeding expected progress in reading and writing was above the national average, while the proportion in mathematics was below. The unvalidated 2016 results show that pupils' progress was at least in line with the national average in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2. Writing, however, was the weaker of the three areas.
- The proportion of pupils who achieve what is expected of them at the end of key stage 1 has historically been above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. However, in recent years not enough pupils have achieved the higher levels. Pupils in Year 1 have achieved above the national average in the phonics screening check for the last three years. Throughout the school, current pupils are making at least expected progress as defined by the school. A growing proportion of pupils are exceeding expected progress in reading, writing and

mathematics. However, progress is slower in mathematics, particularly for the most able pupils.

- School leaders are beginning to make effective use of assessment information to monitor the school's performance. Expectations for the new national curriculum have been shared with all teachers and these are being used to plan for pupils' learning. The progress of pupils is tracked regularly. However, some information is not yet as accurate as it could be. As a result, leaders are not always able to pinpoint underachievement and target extra support if it is needed. As a result, there are pockets of underachievement, particularly for some of the most able pupils in mathematics and writing.
- I visited all classes. Pupils were successfully engaged in their learning, knew what they were learning, and were keen to share their experiences with me and their classmates. As a result, there was a buzz of interest in almost all classes. However, some pupils were not challenged as much as they could be, particularly in mathematics. Pupils that I spoke with said that 'maths is easy'. Pupils are articulate and eager to learn. Some opportunities were missed to move pupils on in their learning even when pupils were asking to do so.
- The early years is a strength of the school because leadership of this area is very effective. When I visited, children in the Reception class had only been in school for a very short period of time. However, they were very settled and have already made good relationships with adults. The children share their learning with each other, one congratulating another saying 'Wow. Well done!' when he successfully matched sounds to pictures. The outdoor area has been expanded since the previous inspection and is used very well to develop children's social and physical skills. Adults support learning well with very timely but sensitive questioning and, as a result, elicit good responses from children. Leaders have established good relationships with parents and other link provisions. As a consequence, adults know where children are in their learning and track their progress meticulously. The current Reception children are articulate and able. The early assessments are reflective of this. Historically, children make good progress in the Reception class and are well prepared for Year 1.
- Scrutiny of pupils' work in mathematics throughout the school evidences that a growing proportion of pupils are exceeding the progress expected of them. There are some examples of teachers challenging pupils, giving guidance on next steps, and pupils' responses. However, these are not yet commonplace. As a result, some pupils do not make as much progress as they could, especially those who are more able. Scrutiny of writing demonstrates a growing proportion of pupils making good progress. This is because there is good guidance from most teachers on what pupils need to do to improve their learning. There are not enough opportunities for pupils to write at length and to practise their basic English skills. The most able pupils in some classes do not make as much progress as they are capable of.

- Leadership across the school is developing well. You are keen to ensure that all teachers have the opportunity to develop their leadership skills and have enabled their attendance at various training events. Improvement planning is likewise developing. It is currently not as sharply focused as it needs to be to ensure that all pupils make as much progress as they can. Some leaders do not yet fully understand the part they play in whole-school improvement. This is essential so that the school continues to identify and focus on the right priorities and so that all leaders can be held to account for pupils' achievement.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers plan regular opportunities for pupils to write at length so that they can practise their basic English skills in all written work
- all available assessment information is used intelligently to highlight and regularly check on pupils who are at risk of falling behind or who are not making as much progress as they are capable of, particularly the more able in writing and mathematics
- improvement planning at all levels is sharpened so that the focus is firmly on the progress of all groups of pupils
- all leaders, who hold key positions, understand the part they play in whole-school improvement and are held to account for the outcomes of all pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Ruth Brock  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, your deputy headteacher and the English/early years lead. I also met with three governors including the chair, and with a representative from the local authority. I reviewed a wide range of documentation including policies, attendance information and governing body minutes. Together with your senior leaders, we looked at numerous examples of pupils' work in their books from the last and this academic year. I observed learning in classes, much of which was with you. A thorough examination of the school's safeguarding arrangements was undertaken. I held a discussion with a group of 10 pupils and with various pupils

during their lessons, listening to some of them read. I also reviewed the 31 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 31 free text messages. The seven responses from the staff questionnaire and the 32 responses from pupils were also considered.

### **Key lines of enquiry for this inspection**

- the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures in the school
- progress made on the areas for improvement from the previous inspection report
- how well the school's assessment system is used to accurately plan work that challenges and supports all pupils
- how well leaders of English and mathematics are monitoring their areas of responsibility to ensure good progress for all pupils from their varying starting points
- how governors are holding to account leaders for standards in the school and in particular, for the progress of disadvantaged pupils.