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6 April 2017

Donna Edson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Edson

### **Short inspection of Yaxley Infant School**

Following my visit to the school on 15 March 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. Yaxley Infants has maintained the positive ethos demonstrated by the school motto, 'play together, learn together, grow together'. Pupils develop strong, healthy relationships with each other and staff members alongside academic skills and understanding. Parents value the support and care that staff provide for pupils at the school. Parents' responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, exemplify the high esteem they hold for the school. Parents commented on how the school 'offers a nurturing and stimulating environment for children', and that the staff 'have made a huge effort' to ensure the ease with which pupils settle into school life. One parent stated that this was 'a very welcoming and friendly environment for our children to begin their academic journey.'

Although you and your deputy headteacher are relatively new to leading the school full time, you have identified key priority areas and worked rigorously to ensure sustained improvements through regular monitoring and review. A specific strength of your work is the focus on developing pupils' emotional and social intelligence to inform the ways in which they learn in the classroom. As a result of the strategies to boost pupils' resilience, independence and empathy, pupils are able to access the curriculum more confidently. Staff work hard to ensure that pupils receive the support they need through clubs such as the 'happy, sad club' and post-lunchtime massage where pupils learn to regulate their behaviour.

Governance at Yaxley Infants is strong. Able to draw on a range of pertinent skills, the governing body provides both challenge and support in equal measure. Governors have high aspirations and expectations for pupils' academic success as well as their health and well-being. They are regular visitors to your school. Their visits link clearly to the priorities identified in the school development plan. Their reports both challenge and celebrate the strategies and approaches you have embedded in your pursuit of excellence.

Pupils are impeccably well behaved. They communicate well with each other and are mindful of the importance of kindness and good manners. Pupils are eager to learn and are supportive of each other in lessons. Pupils maintain their concentration and apply and develop their skills, knowledge and understanding diligently to a range of tasks. Reflecting on pupils' interests and needs, you have ensured that pupils have a rich and broad curriculum. For example, the thematic focus on space, 'to infinity and beyond' and marine life, 'commotion in the ocean' has facilitated pupils with a range of opportunities to develop their communication, writing, reading and mathematical skills. Staff further extend pupils' thinking skills through regular philosophical dialogue whereby pupils consider questions such as whether aliens exist.

You correctly judge the provision in the early years to have improved since the last inspection. Strong leadership has ensured that children make a good start to their learning in Reception classes. The staff have planned the internal and external learning areas well to ensure that children have access to a range of challenging activities. Although boys are making improved progress, you and your early years leader continue to embed strategies pertinent to the needs of boys. For example, your support for the guided teaching sessions has resulted in many children eager to practise their emerging reading, writing and mathematical skills. Teachers and teaching assistants have high expectations of children. They develop pupils' independence through carefully constructed activities and class-based processes. For example, children access their own snack and write their name on a form once they have taken it. As a result, children in Reception develop their communication skills well. However, leaders are aware that boys are still not making as much progress as girls and continue to review and adapt provision accordingly.

You and your leadership team take effective action when you consider improvements are required. For example, you have introduced strategies such as a creative writing club, 'the writing crew', to accelerate the writing skills of the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils. You have plans in place to further improve the achievement of boys to ensure that standards are robustly met in every area of the curriculum.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders, including governors, are meticulous and methodical in their unstinting focus on safeguarding. Records are detailed and reviewed regularly to ensure that all pupils at the school are safe. Leaders are relentless in ensuring the physical and

psychological well-being of pupils at the school. Staff receive regular training and know the school procedures for keeping pupils safe.

Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe when online. Staff also provide additional guidance to help parents to keep children safe when online at home. All of the pupils I spoke to emphasised the importance of telling an adult if they had a problem. They also articulated very clearly how they had learned to deal with unkind friends by extending the flat of their hand and stating firmly, 'stop, I don't like it.' All of the parents who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, concurred that their children were safe and well cared for at the school.

## **Inspection findings**

- A key line of enquiry was how well pupils are prepared to keep themselves safe both within school and beyond. Attendance at school is fundamental to pupils' safety and well-being. The attendance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals was lower than that of pupils nationally in 2016. Persistent absence rates for this group were also high. You have recognised the importance of tracking and reviewing this group to promote their attendance in school. You have raised the fundamental importance of school attendance to parents and pupils through regular updates in parent newsletters, school-focused social media and pupil rewards systems. It is too early to measure the impact of these strategies.
- I also reviewed the progress of the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils. Many of the most able pupils did not make accelerated progress in reading and writing in 2016 at the end of key stage 1; you have now identified the barriers and implemented pertinent support. Leadership supports the development of teachers' skills well. For example, all teachers now use the school feedback policy correctly. Teachers provide extension tasks which pupils eagerly complete helping to accelerate their progress. For example, in their writing books, pupils are encouraged to make links between the grammar that they learn and the ways in which it helps to shape and extend their writing.
- To further extend pupils' skills and understanding, staff focus on the critical importance of language development. For example, I observed teachers in Years 1 and 2 modelling the use of mathematical vocabulary such as 'equation' and 'digit' to extend pupils' ability to explore mathematical problems. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on how they learn. I observed pupils in all year groups thinking about how they work out problems and looking for recurring patterns in mathematics.
- Another key line of enquiry focused on how well boys are supported to improve their achievements in writing, phonics and mathematics. Boys' fine and gross motor skills are developed well in early years through a range of carefully designed activities. As a result, the inspector observed many boys focusing on shaping their letters with care and concentration and holding pencils with greater dexterity. You have rightly identified this as an area for continued improvement and are ably supported by the work of your governing board's focus visits. You have introduced different texts and a comic club to engage the interests of pupils, particularly boys. It is too early to measure the impact of these strategies.

- You have supported the change of delivery of core skills such as reading, writing and mathematics to ensure that all pupils, including lower-ability boys, receive high-quality initial teaching prior to small group support. I observed many pupils applying their phonics knowledge to their reading and writing with confidence throughout the year groups. However, pupils do not consistently use full stops and capital letters accurately in Year 2. Teachers do not always alert pupils to the importance of technical accuracy in writing.
- I also considered the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the early years. Staff support children in Reception very well to develop their language skills to support their mathematics, reading and writing skills. Having identified an issue with boys' progress, leaders looked at models of outstanding provision. Consequently, they have adapted the provision at Yaxley Infants to suit the needs of their children. Girls and boys play and learn together in the carefully constructed zones such as the 'imagination zone' and 'writing zone'. I observed girls and boys discussing, planning and writing about their constructions in a supportive way. As a result, children are making improved progress in all areas of the early years curriculum.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- expectations and aspirations of parents continue to be raised regarding the importance of school attendance for their children so that attendance meets national standards
- embedding the teaching of reading with writing, speaking and listening to improve the achievements of boys working at below-age-related expectations is rigorously pursued so that all pupils achieve as well as they can
- strategies put in place to improve technical accuracy in writing such as full stops and capital letters are robustly and consistently applied.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Aykin  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

- During the course of this inspection I held meetings with you, other senior and middle leaders and a group of three governors including the chair of governors.
- I spoke with pupils informally in classrooms and when walking around the school site. I also met with a group of 12 pupils.

- During two tours of the school with you, I visited each class and observed pupils at work.
- I undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work in their books and folders.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined along with the school's record of checks carried out on staff working at the school.
- A range of documents were analysed or discussed, including: the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans; documents relating to pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour; minutes of governor meetings and curriculum plans.
- I considered the views of 32 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the views parents expressed via free text.