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Miss Jane Birch
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Dear Miss Birch

Short inspection of Moulton School

Following my visit to the school on 29 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 July 2013.

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 deputy headteacher and the governing body continue to ensure that pupils achieve well at Moulton School. Under your leadership, your staff have high expectations of every pupil. They strive to nurture pupils and foster a love of learning in each of them. You are determined that as a learning community you will 'aim high and together you will succeed'. Without doubt, pupils enjoy being at the school and they enjoy learning. The overwhelming majority of parents think that the school provides a very good standard of education.

To sustain this good standard of education, you, alongside the governing body, have carefully and expertly navigated the school through a particularly turbulent period of time. This is because a number of key staff have left the school. You have, however, managed this difficult situation effectively. Indeed, you have now stabilised the school's staffing by recruiting new high-quality teachers and middle leaders. During this time, the standards that the pupils achieve have continued to be good. Now that you have stabilised the situation, you acknowledge that your new middle leadership team requires ongoing development. This is to ensure that they drive further improvements to ensure that pupils excel in their learning.

You know your school very well. You have an accurate view of the strengths and areas for improvement across the school. In addition to stabilising the school's

staffing, you have also recognised that your pupils needed high-quality stimuli to help them to succeed in the new national tests. As part of the improvement journey, you have ensured that pupils have access to materials that will inspire them. For example, all across the school there are displays of the beautiful artwork that your pupils have created. Pupils have studied a range of artists from William Morris to Piet Mondrian. You also use a range of external visits to spark pupils' imagination; for example, pupils go on a trip to Liverpool, before undertaking a project on cities. These projects help to inspire pupils, especially boys, in their learning.

Another way you have energised pupils, especially boys, is through your work to improve the quality of pupils' writing. Under your and your deputy headteacher's direction, your staff have developed confidence and expertise in using novels and texts to inspire pupils to great effect. In each classroom, there are impressive illustrations of how well your pupils can write, for example through their second world war project books and the 'matchbox project'. Around every corner there is a plethora of high-quality reading books in your text-rich school. These creative resources motivate pupils, especially boys, to make even better progress in both their reading and writing. Pupils recognise the work that your teachers do to engage them in their learning.

Improvements since the last inspection have not been limited to reading and writing. In mathematics, pupils also make better progress because of an improvement in the quality of teaching. This is because of strong leadership in this area. Across the school, teachers are now much more confident in planning mathematical activities that develop pupils' problem-solving and reasoning skills. This was a key area for improvement at the last inspection. From early years through to key stage 2, pupils are given a wide range of mathematical problems which require pupils to draw on their prior learning. As a result, by the end of key stage 2, pupils make good progress and achieve well in mathematics. However, as you acknowledge, even more pupils at the end of key stage 1 should achieve the higher standard.

Since the previous inspection, you have also ensured that there has been a sharp focus on ensuring that teachers plan for the different abilities within their classes. This includes teachers' use of challenging questions to extend different pupils' thinking skills. Evidence gathered during the inspection shows that pupils receive work matched correctly to their ability and that over time pupils make good progress. You did, however, recognise that there are more opportunities to challenge the most able so that even more achieve the highest standard across their subjects. At your last inspection, another area for improvement was teachers' use of challenging questions. You have ensured that this has been a priority. It continues to be so for some new staff who still require additional support to use their questions to allow pupils to think more deeply.

Undeniably, Moulton School is a happy, vibrant and exciting place to learn. Pupils' behaviour is excellent because they are encouraged to achieve. Equally, your work to ensure that your pupils are tolerant and respectful of one another is striking.

Pupils say that the pupils in this school are perfect, no matter who they are. Pupils are adamant that bullying will never be tolerated. The school is undoubtedly harmonious.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leadership team ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are robust and fit for purpose. There is a strong culture of safeguarding in your school. Risk assessments are revisited regularly and site security is reviewed frequently. Pupils say that they feel very safe. Parents also confirm that they believe that their children are safe in school. Pupils talk passionately about the opportunities that they have to learn about staying safe online. Staff regularly discuss safeguarding arrangements at their meetings. They also have the opportunity to shape and contribute to school policies.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, evidence was gathered about the effectiveness of leaders' work to improve the proportion of boys who make good progress in mathematics and writing by the end of key stage 2. An extensive and detailed scrutiny of pupils' work, coupled with leaders' own information about boys' progress, showed that boys' progress is now much stronger. Leaders have successfully engaged boys in their learning. Indeed, to improve the quality of boys' writing, leaders have successfully focused on improving boys' spelling, grammar and comprehension skills. In mathematics in key stage 2, there has also been a significant focus on developing pupils' problem-solving and reasoning skills. This too continues to have a positive effect on pupils' progress, including boys, although leaders recognise that there is still more work to do in mathematics.
- The effect of leaders' work to improve the progress of the most able pupils was also a focus of the inspection. An in-depth scrutiny of the most able pupils' work confirmed that their progress is good. The proportion of pupils expected to achieve the higher standard across reading, writing and mathematics is set to rise again this year. Leaders regularly check the quality of their assessments of where pupils are in their learning to ensure that the information that they have is accurate. That said, middle leaders who have responsibility for subjects need more support and ongoing training to ensure that teaching is challenging enough. The most able pupils can and should achieve more.
- Leaders' work to improve pupil's attainment, at a greater depth, in reading and mathematics by the end of key stage 1 was also a focus for this inspection. There is clear evidence in Years 1 and 2 that standards in reading continue to improve. Pupils are being challenged to read more-complex texts and to develop their comprehension skills. Evidence shows that more pupils are well prepared to achieve a greater depth in reading. In mathematics, there is still insufficient challenge in key stage 1. Pupils are not yet developing their problem-solving and reasoning skills to a high enough level. Leaders are acutely aware that more pupils should achieve to a greater depth in mathematics by the end of key stage 1.

- During the inspection, pupils' behaviour was found to be excellent. Leaders have revisited the school's behaviour policy as part of the rolling programme of evaluating the effectiveness of school policies. As a result, a new policy has been introduced in the early years. The number of recorded behaviour incidents across the school, however, is extremely low. Where behaviour sanctions are applied, they are generally for low-level issues, for example, chatting in class. There are no racist or homophobic incidents recorded. Pupils confirm that these incidents do not happen in their school because of leaders' effective work to promote diversity, tolerance and respect. Pupils, parents and staff also feel that bullying is extremely rare. Pupils' behaviour during the inspection was impeccable both in lessons and around the school site. A strong culture of rewards plays an important part in promoting excellent attitudes to learning.
- Finally, the impact of leaders' work to improve attendance was checked during the inspection. Leaders have successfully improved attendance and reduced the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school. Attendance figures are broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school has decreased significantly. Now the figure is below the national average. Leaders have successfully improved the attendance rates for disadvantaged pupils and girls.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they further improve teaching and learning by:
 - strengthening and supporting the new middle leadership team to ensure that more pupils are challenged to excel in their subjects
 - ensuring that teachers routinely use questioning to challenge pupils to think more deeply
 - increasing the opportunities to develop pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills in mathematics, particularly at key stage 1, so that a greater proportion of pupils reach the highest standard.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Smart
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher, parents of pupils from the school, middle leaders and members of the governing body. In addition, I

met formally with a group of pupils from across the school and talked informally with others around the school and in lessons. I listened to pupils read. Furthermore, I jointly observed teaching and learning in key stages 1 and 2 and visited the early years. I examined a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, attendance information, pupils' assessment information, a range of policies, your evaluation of how well the school is performing and your school improvement plan. I also undertook a review of the school's website. As part of the inspection, I considered 60 responses to Ofsted's Parent View, 60 responses to Ofsted's free-text service, 29 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire and eight responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.