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Joanna Orbell
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Dear Mrs Orbell

Short inspection of The Willows School and Early Years Centre

Following my visit to the school on 13 March 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 March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

Parents and carers are delighted with the school. They said that their children are happy and very well looked after. Many of them said that they greatly value the help and support they receive from staff. Parents said that everyone in the school cares about their children, from the headteacher to the site manager.

Pupils really enjoy coming to school. They behave well and treat each other with kindness and respect. The wide range of exciting activities on offer sparks their interest. As a result, they are enthusiastic learners.

The staff take good care of the children. Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are extremely well supported. The school goes the extra mile for these pupils to ensure that they are safe and happy in school. One parent summed this up by saying that staff care for the pupils as if they were their own.

You and other leaders have successfully addressed the issues from the last inspection. Pupils now make more progress in reading and writing because you have strengthened the teaching of these subjects. The subject knowledge of teachers and other staff has been improved. For example, the whole-staff training in phonics enables all staff to quickly identify and address any errors pupils may have. As a result, more pupils are now making rapid progress in phonics, reading

and writing.

There have been many changes in the governing body since the last inspection. This has made it difficult for governors to address some of the areas identified for improvement. However, they are committed to the school and rightly proud of the way that staff ensure that it is a happy and caring community. While the governing body has a good understanding of many aspects of the school, it does not yet have a sufficiently clear picture of the key areas that need to improve. Governors recognise that, because of this, they are not able to guide and monitor improvement activities.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school and Nursery take very good care of the pupils. Parents said that their children are happy and well looked after. Pupils feel safe and parents and staff agree.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You and your team take this aspect of your work extremely seriously. As a result, you work hard to keep children safe. Staff are well trained and have regular opportunities to discuss any concerns they may have. You work closely with other agencies to ensure that pupils receive the support they need. Governors have an effective overview of the culture of safeguarding in the school.

Inspection findings

- Leaders are diligent in their efforts to ensure that all pupils make good progress. Staff work hard to plan engaging lessons that motivate pupils to learn. Maximum use is made of the whole school environment, with equally exciting activities available indoors and outside. Improvements in staff knowledge about pupils' reading and writing have strengthened the impact of their teaching. This is leading to more pupils making greater progress from their starting points than in the past. However, this is not yet the case in mathematics. Pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to explain what they think. This means that staff are not quickly identifying and addressing errors and misconceptions.
- Many pupils join and leave the school during each year. Those who spend a significant period of time in the school make good progress. School information shows that the number of pupils who exceed age-related expectations has increased. This is because the way that staff and leaders use information about what pupils know and can do has improved. For example, this has sharpened teaching in the early years and is leading to more pupils achieving a good level of development. Leaders recognise that they now need to use the analysis of this information to identify precisely the individual pupils who need to improve their rates of progress.
- Leaders have a range of effective strategies to tackle poor attendance. As a result, rates of persistent absence have improved. However, the overall attendance of pupils remains lower than the national average. This hinders the learning of some pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is an increased focus on the progress that pupils make in mathematics in each lesson
- improvement activities address precisely identified areas of weaker practice
- rates of attendance, in particular for pupils from vulnerable groups, match or exceed national averages for primary schools.

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

Yours sincerely

Phil Minns
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you and other leaders to discuss a range of issues including pupils' progress and attendance. I spoke to parents at the start of the day and talked to children at breaktime and during their lessons. Together, we visited classrooms and looked at pupils' work. I met with four members of the governing body and a representative from Milton Keynes local authority. I reviewed school documentation, including the school's policies and procedures for safeguarding. I took account of 25 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 10 written comments. I considered 26 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.