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Mrs Helen Davison-McMullen
Headteacher
Castleford Wheldon Infant School and Nursery
Francis Street
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Dear Mrs Davison-McMullen

Short inspection of Castleford Wheldon Infant School and Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 25 April 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 April 2015.

This school continues to be good.

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

You have reinvigorated the school after taking up the post of headteacher in September 2018. Your clarity of vision and high aspirations for the pupils and staff are having an extremely positive impact on improvements in outcomes and practice. Although you know there is more to be done and difficult staffing decisions to be made, you have included the staff and governors in the process. You have begun to unlock the creativity of the staff. They are now more confident in developing their areas of responsibility, and more secure in trying out new ways of doing things.

Your observations of teaching and learning are accurate, and you always give high-quality advice as to how teachers can improve what they are doing. Sometimes, expectations are not as high as they could be for all pupils, but you are effectively addressing this as a whole-staff focus.

Your introduction of a whole-school approach to teaching phonics and reading is showing a remarkable impact for all pupils, especially boys and those who are disadvantaged. The outcomes in these areas are strong and beginning to impact on the quality of writing too. This has also enabled the pupils who did not achieve a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year last year to start to catch up quickly. Outcomes in mathematics are also showing excellent improvements, with pupils demonstrating their good knowledge and application of skills in the lessons we observed together.

You have ensured that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are exceptionally well supported by highly skilled staff. This is enabling them to access the activities in the classrooms and make consistently good progress. One parent of a child with SEND I spoke with said how much she valued the exchange of information that happens almost daily, and how effectively the school involved them as parents and carers in any planning for their child.

Pupils' behaviour is excellent. Pupils work well together across the school. They sit and listen to each other's contributions in discussions, and readily talk with each other about their work and how they are undertaking a task. They know the high expectations staff have of their behaviour and they follow instructions without hesitation. They move around the school calmly and safely. They are well-mannered, greeting adults and politely waiting to pass in corridors and doorways.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff and governors have regular update training and are knowledgeable about their roles in relation to keeping children safe. The high-quality recording and record-keeping mean that any concerns staff may have about any child are effectively monitored daily and, where necessary, swiftly acted upon.

A relevant member of the school staff always attends multi-agency meetings. You are tenacious in ensuring that other professionals action agreed plans, so that pupils and their families access services to help them with any problems they may have.

Inspection findings

- You are having an extremely positive impact on the leadership and management of the school. Since your arrival, you have swiftly and clearly identified the priorities for development, having thoroughly analysed all the evidence at your disposal. You have taken decisive action to implement improvements across all areas. Staff are highly supportive of the changes you are making and feel more ownership of the direction of the school. Although progress towards the actions recommended at the previous inspection had stalled, you have incorporated these into your own improvement plans, and are now on track to have addressed these successfully these by the end of the current school year.
- You have clearly defined the role of middle leaders. Your middle leaders are now able to identify priorities and developments, and act upon these. They are leading their subject areas effectively. The current curriculum is not always engaging pupils, and this can be seen in the quality and depth of the work they produce. Curriculum redesign, although in its early stages of development, is logical and builds on previously learned skills, knowledge and concepts. By releasing the enthusiasm and imagination of the staff, this is producing high-quality experiences for the pupils, for example researching mini-beasts first-hand through visitors bringing in extraordinary insects, by hunting for them in the extensive school grounds and by studying a wormery.

- You are aware of the importance of strong governance. The appointment of a national leader of governance as your chair of governors is positively influencing the way governors fulfil their role. However, there is still little evidence of the governing body consistently challenging the school.
- You regularly observe staff teaching, you talk to pupils and you examine their work. This has given you the evidence that teaching is good overall. However, you know that this could be even better and have identified this aspect as one of your overarching priorities. This is because staff do not consistently have high enough expectations, especially of the most able pupils. We saw how they tend to accept and praise good work, and not challenge the pupils to further effort and higher goals. You have successfully addressed the poor standards of attainment reached last year by children in the early years. However, there is further work needed to embed this improvement. You have improved the early years learning environment so that it is now more focused on learning. However, staff interactions to develop children's critical thinking skills in the outdoors provision are not sufficiently challenging.
- For boys who are disadvantaged, progress is not as good as that of other pupils. You are reviewing how the pupil premium funding is spent and identifying where the strengths and weaknesses are. For those pupils who also have additional vulnerabilities, you have secured specialist provision to effectively support their mental health and well-being.
- The two parents I spoke to during the inspection were both positive about all aspects of the school. This view is reinforced by almost all parents who responded with comments to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. The actions you have taken to address the high absence rate of pupils, such as introducing the breakfast club, are improving the school's overall attendance figure swiftly towards the national average. Of particular note is how successful your actions have been in reducing the number of pupils who are persistently absent.
- You have effectively reviewed the behaviour policy and playground activities. You have provided simple equipment to support play and imaginative games, such as tyres and crates. Pupils play well together, and staff engage well with the pupils to develop their play. There is no evidence of bullying and pupils are respectful of each other.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the outdoors provision is enhanced in the early years to enable children to reinforce their learning independently, develop their critical thinking skills and improve adult interactions
- governors enhance their skills to enable them to better support and challenge the school
- all staff have consistently high expectations for all pupils across all areas of the school and that these translate into better outcomes and at least consistently

good progress, especially for boys who are disadvantaged and the most able 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 Wakefield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Geoffrey Dorrity
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

The focus of the inspection was to affirm the judgements identified at the previous Section 5 inspection and to find out how well pupils and the school were progressing. I held a variety of meetings with you and your staff. I observed several sessions jointly with you in the early years and in key stage 1. I considered a range of evidence, including the school improvement plan and leaders' self-evaluation. I also reviewed other documentation.

I met with the chair of the governing body and spoke with a representative of the local authority. I considered the 45 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and I spoke with two parents. I also took account of the 12 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and spoke with six members of staff.