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25 April 2019

Kerry Jarman
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Dear Ms Jarman

Short inspection of Wavendon Gate School

Following my visit to the school on 4 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 July 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement, which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Leaders' actions to tackle the areas for improvement from the previous inspection and to improve the quality of teaching across the school have not been fully successful. Since taking up the post of headteacher in September 2018, you have set about school improvement with determination and focus. You have made deep-rooted changes to the structure and organisation of the school. These changes include strengthening the system for tracking pupils' progress. However, you rightly identify that teaching is not consistently strong, and needs further development. Across both key stages, most-able pupils and pupils with potential are not set work which is challenging enough. In addition, sometimes teachers' explanations to the whole class are not clear or accurate, indicating that some teachers' subject knowledge is not sufficiently secure, particularly when teaching phonics.

While the systems you have established are beginning to improve progress for pupils, disadvantaged pupils across the school do not attain as well as other pupils. Their progress across the school remains inconsistent. You have rightly identified this pupil group as a focus. Actions such as the appointment of a specific pupil premium governor are focused on ensuring that the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is more effective in raising achievement for these pupils across the curriculum.

Many subject leaders are new to their posts. They have yet to develop systematic and effective methods for improving teaching in the subjects they lead. In particular, they are not yet proficient in evaluating their initiatives and enriching teachers' subject knowledge.

Governors are aware that further improvements need to be made. The governing body has emerged from a period of change and is now a more focused and sharper team. Members of the governing body have accessed relevant training, for instance for data analysis, and are confident about how best to hold leaders to account. They visit the school regularly to see things for themselves. You have established a strong and open relationship with governors. Together you are wholeheartedly committed to continuing to drive forward improvement.

During my visit it was evident that pupils enjoy school. They work industriously at their tasks and get along well together. As a result, the school is a calm, orderly and happy environment. Pupils told me how much they enjoy the trips and visits that enrich their learning. They are keen to learn, particularly when their learning impacts on their lives. For instance, a pupil proudly told me how useful learning to tell the time had been and that now he had got himself a clock. Pupils value how the ways in which they have a voice, such as through school council, contribute to leading the school. They are keen to demonstrate the school values and to earn the resultant values cards which they are awarded.

Children get off to a good start in the early years. The learning environment is well structured with activities which engage children's curiosity and stimulate investigation. Staff ensure that a focus on developing early writing skills helps to prepare children well for Year 1.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All necessary checks are carried out before staff are appointed. All required safeguarding training is up to date and complete. Processes have been reviewed by governors, who work effectively with leaders to ensure that everything is as it should be.

Pupil well-being is a central part of the culture of the school. This helps to keep pupils safe. Pupils know who to speak to if they have concerns. They are confident that they will be listened to. You have sensibly ensured that the highly effective learning mentor team members have enhanced safeguarding training. This helps them to keep a watchful eye and to quickly identify when additional support may help to keep pupils safe.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection we looked closely together at several aspects of the school's work. This included the teaching of phonics in key stage 1. Sometimes the teaching of phonics lacks clarity and sequence. When this happens, pupils do

not have enough opportunity to build or apply their skills. As a result, they make insufficient progress.

- We also looked at the provision for disadvantaged pupils. Some disadvantaged pupils do not attend school well enough. The learning mentor team has been successful in raising attendance levels for some pupils. Nevertheless, you acknowledge that more work is needed to raise levels of attendance further.
- Across the school and across subjects, the achievement of disadvantaged pupils remains inconsistent. The achievement of the most able disadvantaged pupils and those with potential is not tracked closely enough. As a result, governors and leaders cannot evaluate carefully the effectiveness of the additional pupil premium funding for these pupils.
- We looked at the effectiveness of the teaching of mathematics. Pupils' books showed that there has been some impact of a focus on raising arithmetical skills. Pupils were applying a range of calculation methods with increasing accuracy. They are benefiting from increased opportunities to apply their knowledge and demonstrate mathematical reasoning. Nevertheless, sometimes in lessons teaching does not match up closely enough with pupils' needs. Pupils either struggle to complete tasks or finish quickly and do not know how to proceed. This hampers their progress.
- Raising achievement in writing has been a focus for school leaders. This has not yet been fully successful. While leaders point to improved presentation and handwriting, work to improve grammar skills is still ongoing. However, work in pupils' books demonstrates regular opportunities to write at length for a range of purposes. Pupils' writing uses rich vocabulary. Teachers ensure that pupils are aware of how to improve their work.
- We also considered the capacity of leaders, particularly subject leaders, to improve the school. There has been a period of staffing change, which has meant that many leaders are new to their roles. You are wisely working closely with the local authority to increase leadership capacity at all levels. Subject leadership is developing. Leaders have put plans in place but have not evaluated the impact of these on pupils' learning. They have not checked the quality of teaching in their subjects.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching is further improved so that it is more closely matched to pupils' needs and provides systematic challenge
- the attendance and achievement of disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, are raised
- leadership skills are further developed so that all leaders can drive improvement across the school effectively in their designated areas.

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

Deborah Gordon
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met regularly together. I also met with staff, members of the governing body and with a representative of the local authority. I reviewed documentation, including: the school's own information about pupils' achievement; the school improvement plan; and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures.

Together, we visited classes across the school. In lessons, I observed pupils learning, looked at their books, and spoke to pupils about their work. I had a meeting with pupils to gather their views of the school and considered 84 responses to the pupil survey. I took into account the views of parents I met on the playground, and also considered 46 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 29 free-text comments. I also analysed 34 responses to the Ofsted staff survey.