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20 April 2017

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Dear Mrs Deans

Short inspection of White Court School

Following my visit to the school on 16 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 January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

You and your leadership team have restored the good quality of education in this improving primary school since the previous inspection. This comes after a period in which your own evidence demonstrates that elements of the school's provision had declined and needed to improve.

On your arrival, you judged that standards were not high enough. You rightly took action to improve the quality of education provided. For example, you significantly improved the standard of education provided within early years. You are justly proud of the excellent start children are now able to make at White Court School. You also identified that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in key stages 1 and 2 was variable. You correctly challenged poorer practice and have brought about an improvement in the quality of teaching and accuracy of assessment, which are now good.

Recognising that, in 2015, pupil achievement by the end of key stage 2 was too low, you took further decisive action. You increased the pace of the improvement work that was already under way and introduced new strategies to further improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The impact of your work is evident in the much-improved outcomes, at each key stage, in 2016. Notably, by the end of key stage 2, pupil progress in mathematics and reading was significantly better than the national average. The impact can also be seen in the good and sometimes better progress being made by many pupils currently in school.

There is strong and improving leadership at White Court School. The well-led governing body has amended its structures and now has a sharper focus on pupil achievement and well-being. Governors are making good use of their considerable knowledge and experience to challenge and support you well. Recent leadership appointments have also increased the momentum of school improvement. Enthusiastic year and subject leaders are becoming increasingly effective in their roles. They welcome the opportunities you have provided for them to develop their areas of responsibility. Consequently, the curriculum has been enriched by improved provision in subjects such as science, art and music. As a result of English and mathematics subject leaders' amendments to the curriculum, pupils make good and sometimes better progress in these subjects. However, leaders of other subjects acknowledge that they need to track the progress different groups of pupils make more precisely and hold teachers more clearly to account for the progress that pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make.

The overwhelming majority of parents are supportive of the work of the school. Almost all of the 124 parents who responded on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend the school to other parents. In their comments on the free-text service, parents remarked upon the approachability of staff and the friendly, positive ethos that exists throughout the school. Parents also value the fact that individual children's needs are recognised and accommodated. One parent commented, 'The school supports children as individuals, develops their strengths and gives them confidence where needed.' Another stated that their child was delighted to come to school as, 'it is a big school, but does not feel like it'.

White Court is a school where pupils are happy and hard-working. Pupils behave very well and typically get on with one another. They are polite and considerate of each other's needs. Behaviour in lessons is characterised by pupils' positive attitudes and enthusiasm for their education. Across all year groups, pupils display enjoyment and determination in their learning. One child in early years was visibly delighted as he mastered a mathematical problem. The fact his classmate was as pleased for him epitomises the supportive ethos that you are successfully developing in the school.

You are successfully firing pupils' enthusiasm for learning. They enjoy the range of topics they study. For example, one pupil commented, 'we really like the curriculum, it is fascinating'. His peers agreed. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well provided for. Pupils understand why it is important to learn about different cultures and faiths. One pupil explained, 'it helps us respect other people's views', while another stated, 'it is important in life to know about our differences'. Pupils are proud to take up the leadership opportunities afforded to them. One pupil explained that being a peer reader 'helps me learn how younger pupils learn'. Others explained how much they like being sports leaders or eco leaders. Pupils also enjoy the rigour of increasingly challenging work. Inspection evidence demonstrates that you and your staff are successfully helping pupils to develop into more assured learners. A pupil working on a mathematics problem told me, 'I like the challenge, it is not easy, but it is building my confidence'. Another

commented, 'we like to challenge ourselves to do even better'.

You and your governors recognise that more needs to be done to achieve the school's aim of providing an outstanding quality of education. Your succinct improvement plan accurately outlines where things still need to improve. For example, you have clear plans to increase the opportunities for pupils to use high-quality literacy skills across the curriculum. However, the targets against which you measure how successful you are in achieving your aims lack precision.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils told me that White Court School is a safe, happy place in which to learn. They explained that adults are kind and would listen to any concerns that pupils had. Almost every parent who responded on Parent View agreed that their child is safe and happy at the school.

Pupils understand what bullying is and the upsetting consequences it can have. They stated that, while it may happen sometimes, it is dealt with well by staff at the school. Pupils also understand how to keep themselves safe in a variety of settings. They describe the appropriate actions they would take to protect themselves from risks when using the internet. Pupils also outlined how school leaders help them understand how to keep safe when near roads or when cycling.

Teachers take their duty to keep pupils safe seriously. As a result of appropriate training, adults know what to do if they have concerns about a pupil's well-being. Adults told me that if they report a concern, it will be dealt with appropriately by senior staff. Leaders' careful and detailed records demonstrate the appropriate and timely actions taken when a child is at risk and in need of support.

Leaders, including governors, have developed a strong safeguarding culture in school. Governors ensure that policies are kept up to date and that leaders carry out appropriate checks on adults working at the school.

Inspection findings

- Children enter early years with skills and capabilities which are broadly in line with their peers nationally. In 2015, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development, while improving, was too low. In 2016, the proportion of children that achieved a good level of development by the end of Reception was considerably higher than the national average. On this inspection, I sought to ascertain whether these improvements have been maintained.
- The leadership of the early years provision is highly effective. The leader of early years, supported by you and your governors, has established a very well organised, stimulating learning environment in which children are making good, and often better, progress. Adults have high expectations of what children can achieve. Teachers skilfully plan learning that interests children and helps them develop their English and mathematics skills. Children behave exceptionally well and work cooperatively with adults and their classmates. Inspection evidence

indicates that a high proportion of children are on track to achieve a good level of development in 2017. The proportion exceeding a good level of development is also increasing.

- I also explored how well pupils progress in writing. In 2015, pupils achieved significantly less well than they should have by the end of key stage 2. Pupils' attainment in key stage 1 was in line with the national average. You and your leaders have taken effective action to improve the quality of writing across the school. You have amended the curriculum to include texts that capture the interest of pupils, especially boys. You have also ensured that teachers provide precise feedback that helps pupils to develop their writing skills.
- Teachers are typically well practised in delivering the skills and knowledge pupils need to make rapid progress. Pupils are increasingly accomplished in editing and redrafting their work. Their strong progress is evident in their books and also displayed in their work on the writing wall in each classroom. However, boys in key stage 1 do not present their work with the same care and precision as girls. You are already taking action to ensure that the quality of boys' presentation improves.
- As a result of your actions, in 2016, under new accountability measures, pupils made progress in line with their peers nationally, in writing, by the end of key stage 2. Most-able pupils made significantly better progress. Pupils in key stage 1 made good progress in writing. Pupils, including most-able pupils, currently in school are making good, and sometimes better, progress in their writing.
- I also established how well disadvantaged pupils achieve. This was because, in key stage 1, these pupils did not achieve as well as other pupils nationally in 2016. Under the leadership of your deputy headteacher, the provision for these pupils is improving and is good. Staff now know these pupils well and are alert to the barriers to learning they face. Teachers use this information effectively and plan learning that is well matched to disadvantaged pupils' needs. The progress that each disadvantaged pupil makes is carefully logged in their 'prime time' record books. Evidence from your accurate assessment information and from pupils' work demonstrates that these pupils are typically making good progress across the curriculum.
- Another key line of enquiry was to establish how effectively leaders are reducing the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent from school. This is because, in 2016, the proportion of these pupils who were persistently absent was high. You track the attendance of each pupil with care. Where a pupil's attendance begins to fall, you take decisive action. This is leading to improvements for some pupils who have a history of low attendance. A small proportion of pupils still do not attend as often as they should and this remains a priority for improvement.
- To ascertain if White Court School continues to provide a good standard of education, I examined the progress that pupils make in subjects other than English and mathematics. Pupils have access to a diverse and well-designed curriculum. However, inspection evidence demonstrates that, while pupils generally make good progress across a range of subjects, they could do better. Some teachers do not have consistently high expectations of what pupils can do

in subjects such as history, science and French. As a consequence, in some classes, pupils are not routinely given opportunities in these subjects to demonstrate the high standards of literacy and numeracy of which they are capable.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- you have clear measurable targets against which you monitor the pace and impact of your school improvement activities
- teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can do across all subjects in the curriculum including regular opportunities to apply basic skills in all subjects, and that middle leaders then make sure teachers provide opportunities for pupils to apply the same high standards of literacy and numeracy in subjects other than English and mathematics
- the rigour and precision with which leaders monitor pupil progress in English and mathematics is replicated by leaders of other subjects
- the small number of pupils who do not attend school as often as they should, do so.

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

Yours sincerely

John Lucas
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During the course of this inspection, I held meetings with you, your administration manager, other senior and middle leaders and five governors. I also held a phone discussion with a representative from the local authority.
- During two tours of the school with you, I visited classes in each year group and observed pupils at work. During these tours, I also 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 adults working at the school.
- A range of documents was analysed or discussed, including: the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans; documents relating to pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour; and minutes of governor meetings.
- I spoke with pupils informally in classrooms and when walking around the school

site. I also met with a group of 15 pupils chosen by you.

- I took account of the views of 55 members of staff and 174 pupils who responded to the Ofsted online surveys.
- I considered the views of 124 parents who responded to Parent View, as well as those of the 63 who left comments on the free-text service and, in two cases, via email. I also took into account the opinions of parents who spoke with me over the course of the inspection.