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Mr Aaron Perrin
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mr Perrin

Short inspection of Willaston Primary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 25 April 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in September 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

When the predecessor school was last inspected, school leaders were asked to improve the overall quality of leadership. Since then, the leadership team and the constitution of the governing body have changed significantly. You were appointed as deputy headteacher in September 2017. You were promoted to acting headteacher in March 2018 due to the sudden departure of the previous headteacher. You and the newly appointed acting deputy headteacher have quickly adapted to your new roles. Together, you have been quick to make your mark. For example, you identified gaps in training and have made sure that all staff received appropriate training as a matter of priority. You have managed this new role while maintaining a teaching responsibility for Year 6, five mornings per week.

Parents and carers that I spoke to were concerned about the high number of staff changes that have taken place in the school recently. A significant number of parents felt that the changes in senior leadership have been too rapid with little information shared with them by governors. Those that I spoke to on the playground and those who responded to the Ofsted surveys were of the same opinion. However, despite these worries, parents felt that the relationships between pupils and staff were strong. Parents typically described the staff as being caring. They said that teachers and other staff pay attention to the well-being and progress of the pupils in their care.

Over time, you, previous school leaders and governors have worked hard to address areas of improvement identified at the previous inspection. Monitoring records show that pupils benefit from good teaching. All published performance information shows that attainment rose considerably in 2017 compared to disappointing results in 2016. You introduced challenge activities in all areas of learning in September 2017. You did this to enable pupils to work with increased levels of independence and become more self-reliant learners across the curriculum.

Pupils arrive at school full of energy and eager to learn. You and the staff are visible and greet the pupils as they arrive. You have ensured that the school is welcoming and friendly. Pupils that I spoke to said that they enjoy coming to school. They told me about their favourite subjects. Pupils said that bullying and name-calling were rare but they did occasionally happen. They said that you were approachable and adults were easy to talk to. Pupils that I spoke to were knowledgeable about British society and religions other than their own. They talked to me about different family types and how they are free to make life choices. They told me how they learn about the wider world through their 'Global Learning Programme'.

Governors are supportive of the school. They have worked in partnership with you and the acting deputy headteacher to ensure that pupils are safe. Governors are aware of their statutory responsibilities and challenge and support you in equal measure. With the governors we agreed that you and the acting deputy headteacher need time and further training, ensuring that the school continues to develop under your newly formed leadership team.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have made sure that safeguarding arrangements are effective and fit for purpose. All members of staff have received adequate training in basic awareness of safeguarding. You have addressed additional training needs as a matter of priority. Rigorous checks are made on the suitability of adults to work in school. Three members of the governing body have had safer recruitment training. Processes for vetting visitors to the school are sound. As the designated lead for safeguarding, you work with a number of outside agencies, including Cheshire Constabulary, children's social care and the Cheshire East safeguarding team.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They told me about how they are taught to stay safe through the curriculum. They were able to talk about the dangers of posting information on the internet and social media. They know that they should never use their full names or be identifiable from their school uniforms. Parents who responded to the Ofsted surveys were of the opinion that their children were safe.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, I focused on three key lines of enquiry. The first of these related to the quality of provision in the early years. Published pupil performance information shows that children do not always do as well in mathematics as they

do in reading and writing at the end of the Reception Year. As a result, you have altered your planning to ensure that all children make good progress. The indoor and outdoor learning environments are vibrant and support learning well. You carefully structure mathematical activities to engage children and spark their curiosity. Children have many opportunities to build on prior learning. For example, you plan activities to ensure that children have opportunities to count, recognise numbers and complete calculations, while constantly developing their basic mathematical skills.

- The behaviour of children in the early years is strong. Children are keen to learn. From looking at a wide range of mathematical work I could see that children are making good progress from their starting points. This progress is reflected in your own tracking and monitoring information. The gaps between the progress children make in mathematics compared to the progress they make in reading and writing are closing quickly.
- The second area that I looked at focused on the quality of phonics provision in the early years and key stage 1. Results from the phonics screening check have been below the national average for the previous two years. Together, we observed phonics learning in the early years and in key stage 1. Levels of pupil engagement were high and pupils responded well to challenges. Pupils that I spoke to and those that I heard read were able to read well and sound out unfamiliar words.
- You encourage teachers to use a wide range of varied methods to deliver phonics. Pupils benefit from opportunities to engage in whole-class teaching, small group interventions and interactive games. Pupils that I spoke to were knowledgeable about their learning and use resources on their desks well to support their learning. Your pupil tracking and monitoring information shows that increased numbers of pupils are currently working above the level expected by the end of Year 1. Those who are not receive timely supported interventions from highly skilled teaching assistants.
- The final area that I looked at related to the quality of writing across the school. Published data shows that pupils do not do as well in writing as they do in mathematics and reading. Although writing results improved in 2017, published data for the end of key stage 2 shows that, for the past three years, the progress that pupils make in writing has been in the bottom 20% of all schools nationally. Together we agreed that this needs to improve, ensuring that pupils make better progress by the end of Year 6.
- Together we visited classes in key stage 1 and key stage 2. We looked at examples of pupils' writing from across the curriculum. Your monitoring records show that from September 2017 you changed your approach to the teaching of writing and how you monitor the quality of work produced. The improvements needed to be made in writing are a key feature of your school development plan. Recent monitoring by the English subject leader showed clear strengths and areas for development which were clearly communicated to staff. You are currently in the process of drawing up a list of 'non-negotiables' in relation to your expectations for writing, which you plan to roll out to all staff during the summer term.

- From looking at a range of pupils' books together, we could see that pupils apply the same standards to their written work in English, science and topic work. There is consistency across all subjects. Standards of handwriting are typically neat and books are well presented. Pupils have opportunities to write across a broad and interesting curriculum. For example, in key stage 2 we observed how the writing process was built up over time as pupils apply their skills to write poetry. In topic books, we looked at examples of written debates about deforestation. In Year 6, pupils write with care about the Great War. They apply their skills to write narratives, recounts and explanations. In the Reception class, children write recipes and opportunities to write are evident in all areas of the provision. In all year groups, we could see that pupils are making good progress. However, we did agree that you need to do more to ensure that pupils apply spelling, punctuation and grammar knowledge to their writing with greater care. Inconsistencies in the application of these skills were most evident in Years 1, 2 and 3.
- Performance information for current pupils shows that, with the exception of Years 2 and 5, the progress pupils make in writing is improving. It is now in line with the progress pupils make in reading and mathematics. We agreed that these improvements should continue and be evident in published outcomes for pupils at the end of key stage 2.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils apply basic skills of punctuation, grammar and spelling to all writing activities
- they build on the actions already taken to improve the progress pupils make in writing by the end of key stage 2
- newly established leaders have time and training adequate to develop their roles in the leadership of the school.

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

Yours sincerely

John Donald
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you and your acting deputy headteacher. I met members of the governing board and spoke to members of staff. I held telephone conversations with a representative from Cheshire East local authority and your

school improvement partner. I scrutinised the school's single central record and viewed a range of safeguarding documentation. I reviewed the school's self-evaluation and school development plan. Together we visited all classes.

I spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at pupils' books from a range of subject areas. I listened to pupils read and spoke to them at lunchtime about behaviour, safety and learning. I considered the 69 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I considered the 15 responses to the staff survey and the 40 responses to the free-text survey. I completed a review of the school's website.