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Mrs S Isherwood
Principal
Marlfields Primary Academy
Waggs Road
Congleton
Cheshire
CW12 4BT

Dear Mrs Isherwood

Short inspection of Marlfields Primary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 2 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in January 2010.

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 developed a broad and balanced curriculum which is successful in engaging pupils in their learning but also helps to broaden their horizons. Much emphasis is placed on providing pupils with wider opportunities in life. This involves engagement in the arts, radio, enterprise, environmental awareness and fair trade, to name but a few. There is an air of calm around your school, which is characterised by warm and positive relationships between pupils and also between your staff and pupils. Your staff work well together in an inclusive environment and aim to achieve the best possible outcomes for pupils. As a result, pupils are keen to learn and make good progress.

At the previous inspection, the inspector reported that your assessment of pupils' work did not always inform them how to improve their understanding. This aspect of your work is now much stronger. Work in pupils' books shows that teachers clarify how pupils can improve their work and pupils are given opportunities to do so. You have also introduced a new assessment system. This allows teachers to monitor pupils' progress more closely and to adapt their teaching to concentrate on weaker aspects of pupils' understanding.

We discussed the areas of strength in the academy and those areas that you are seeking to improve. You have correctly focused on developing pupils' reading skills and this has had an impact in the strong progress that pupils make overall in this

subject. You are currently focusing on developing pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills in mathematics. This is a real strength in some parts of the school, such as in Years 5 and 6, but is not well developed in key stage 1. We also discussed how there should be a sharper focus on the progress made by the most able pupils across the school, but particularly in key stage 1. This is one of the key priorities you have already identified in your own evaluation of the academy's effectiveness.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of high quality. There is a culture of safety around the school. Staff are aware of their responsibilities in protecting pupils from harm and understand the procedures for informing others that a pupil might be at risk. Leaders have ensured that staff and governors are kept up to date with training and with the latest government legislation.

Records indicate that, when concerns are raised, they are followed up swiftly and robustly. Records of actions taken and the conversations held when a pupil is potentially at risk are detailed and comprehensive. Leaders ensure that all of the required checks are completed before adults are allowed to work with pupils.

Inspection findings

- Children make good progress in the early years. They arrive in the Reception class with skills below those typically expected for their age. Staff monitor children's progress very carefully and know how to shape the teaching of pupils so that most make the progress of which they are capable. In 2016, fewer children achieved a good level of development by the end of their time in early years compared to other children nationally. This was the result of a larger number of children having lower than expected skills when they arrived. Although not as many children achieved a good level of development, the vast majority of children made good progress from their starting points.
- The teaching of phonics is a strength of the school. Teachers check pupils' understanding of phonics regularly. This alerts staff to any pupils who are falling behind with their learning and allows pupils to quickly receive any extra support. The teaching of phonics is well matched to pupils' abilities so that most make strong progress. Consequently, the proportion of pupils who pass the national phonics check has been above the national average for the last three years.
- The majority of pupils make good progress in key stage 1. Your own assessment information, progress within the sessions we observed and work in pupils' books confirm this to be the case. Challenging the most able pupils is an aspect which you have correctly identified as an area for improvement. The tasks set in lessons for these pupils in key stage 1 are matched to their abilities. However, pupils do not have enough opportunities to apply their skills to broaden and deepen their understanding of subjects, for example in writing and mathematics. We also discussed how you should sharpen your checks on the progress of the most able pupils across the school.

- Your work to improve pupils' ability to reason and solve problems in mathematics is starting to bear fruit. Examples of such work in pupils' books in Years 5 and 6 show that pupils' ability to explain their mathematical thinking when solving problems is well embedded. Older pupils talk confidently about this aspect of their understanding and know why it is important for them to be able to use reasoning in mathematics. We discussed how this very strong practice in mathematics teaching should be shared with all teachers, especially those in key stage 1.
- A small number of parents reported that the school does not deal well with bullying. My findings confirm that bullying is a rare occurrence at Marlfields and that, when it happens, it is dealt with quickly. Your records indicate that, when a concern is raised, there is regular dialogue with the pupil and their parents to ensure that you work closely to resolve any issues. All pupils questioned, and the vast majority of pupils who responded to a questionnaire, confirm that bullying is not a problem within the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the progress of the most able pupils is monitored more closely so that more pupils achieve greater depth in their learning, especially in key stage 1
- the teaching of mathematics in key stage 1 allows pupils to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills more effectively.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, 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

Ian Hardman
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your senior leadership team. I met with five members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body, and spoke with a school adviser. I met separately with the vice-principal and the early years leader. I spoke with six parents who were attending a coffee morning and considered the responses from 17 parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I visited most classrooms with the vice-principal to observe and speak with pupils about their learning. We also scrutinised pupils' books from a range of subjects in the classes visited.

I considered a wide range of documentation and information relating to your self-evaluation, school improvement planning, attendance, governance, assessment and safeguarding.

The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.