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Mr Stuart Wynn
Head of Academy
Willow Green Academy
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Dear Mr Wynn

Short inspection of Willow Green Academy

Following my visit to the school on 7 March 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 the school was judged to be good in March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your leadership team have all been recruited to the school since the last inspection. At that inspection, your predecessor was asked to improve the quality of teaching so that more pupils could make faster progress, and to improve leaders' reporting to the academy advisory board.

You and your leadership team have a clear vision for the school and have fostered an open culture where pupils are at the heart of everything you do. You have worked effectively with the executive principal and other members of the trust to identify issues and take appropriate and sometimes difficult actions. Together you have adopted an analytical approach, making good decisions that have enabled you to move the school forward. The assistant principal is also the teaching and learning leader. She leads by example in her own teaching as well as coaching and nurturing others effectively.

Teachers have developed strong relationships with pupils that enable the pupils to work with resilience and confidence. Teaching assistants have a thorough understanding of their roles and are particularly effective in supporting pupils who may need additional teaching in reading, phonics and mathematics.

You are regularly held to account for pupils' progress by the academy advisory board and by the Delta trust. Open and honest professional discussions within staff meetings and within the trust are helping you to accurately identify those areas of learning that are most in need of improvement and to put into place actions to

swiftly address issues. This is enabling rapid improvement to take place within your school. Evidence of this can be seen in improved outcomes in phonics and reading overall, but also in the increase in the number of pupils reaching higher standards across key stages 1 and 2.

In 2017, at the end of key stage 2, pupils' progress overall, including that of disadvantaged pupils, was broadly in line with national figures for reading and mathematics. Some 20% more pupils reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined than in 2016. Pupils' progress in writing was above the national average, but it was more mixed in reading. Despite some pupils making very strong progress, around two thirds did not. Pupils in key stage 1 attained outcomes that were above national figures in reading, writing and mathematics but disadvantaged pupils did less well than other pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all staff and academy advisory board members are fully trained and up to date in identifying potential risks to pupils. Staff and visitors to the school know whom to alert if they have concerns. Academy board members make sure that you follow safe recruitment practices and that staff and visitors to the school are cleared to work with children.

A few parents and carers raised concerns about bullying through Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. However, most pupils who spoke to me during the day said that bullying was rare. When it does happen, pupils earnestly told me they 'tell the bully to stop it' and that that usually works. If it does not, then a teacher always makes it stop.

In fact, pupils' behaviour is very good. They conduct themselves calmly when moving between classes and assembly and, although lunchtimes are somewhat noisier, pupils are chatty and sociable. Pupils in classes demonstrated great attitudes to learning and were willing to have a go, to make mistakes and to learn from these mistakes.

You have taken care to promote regular attendance and punctuality in the school and to discourage the taking of holidays during term-time. For example, pupils enjoy collecting tokens towards buying something from the 'attendance shop'. Consequently, pupils' attendance overall is just above national figures.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, I wanted to find out what leaders have done to improve the quality of teaching and learning overall, particularly in reading.
- You and your team have worked with great precision to ensure the accuracy of teachers' assessments. You have introduced rigorous systems that enable you to carefully follow the progress of all pupils. This has enabled you to identify accurately which pupils are likely to reach the standards expected for their age and to put into place effective, individual support for those who are not on track.

As a result, you can show considerable improvement in the proportion of pupils who are working at the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics.

- You quickly realised that pupils' outcomes in 2016 were not good enough, particularly in reading, and took decisive action to improve the teaching of reading. Together with the executive principal and other schools within the trust, you have devised and implemented a new approach that places equal importance on developing pupils' fluency and comprehension. You have ensured that staff and pupils have ample time to study high-quality, challenging, whole-class texts to develop pupils' understanding. Pupils are encouraged to develop their ability to read at speed, digesting important facts as they proceed through texts. As a result, you have raised pupils' attainment and progress in reading throughout the school so that the vast majority of pupils are reading texts appropriate for their age. Over one third are now working at greater depth.
- The leader for reading has been very active in developing the knowledge of all staff to enable them to teach phonics successfully. She has adapted phonics plans to enable teachers to meet the needs of pupils at Willow Green more effectively. Consequently, pupils' outcomes in phonics are well above the national average.
- Pupils' secure knowledge of phonics is supporting them in getting off to a good start in reading so that, in key stage 1, higher proportions of pupils are attaining the expected standard than seen nationally. Less-able readers in key stage 2 continue to utilise phonics to support them in reading and writing words they find difficult.
- Pupils' books and reading records show pupils read regularly and that pupils in danger of falling behind, including those who are disadvantaged, receive additional support. When I listened to pupils read, their love of books shone through. They value the weekly reading assemblies and enjoy your sharing of stories and poems. Pupils are benefiting from exposure to more advanced whole-class texts and are beginning to use adventurous vocabulary in their writing as a result. Teachers have maintained a focus on securing accurate comprehension of language so that more pupils are reading expressively and can explain what they are reading.
- Pupils read and respond to texts daily. Pupils' books, particularly in key stage 2, show that they are able to articulate their thoughts and responses well when required to read beyond the surface features of the texts.
- Working with your team, you have carefully identified the specific barriers to learning for individual disadvantaged pupils and have put into place bespoke and sensitive support. Senior leaders ensure that teachers plan well to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils. This support has had a positive impact on progress so that the majority of disadvantaged pupils are working at standards expected for their age in all core subjects. However, even though you have done much to diminish differences in reading and mathematics, there is still a discernible difference between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and that of others in writing.

- Children enter Willow Green with skills and abilities broadly typical for their age. Staff in the early years ensure that children are safe and happy in the setting and are successfully helping them to develop skills across many areas of learning. Staff are skilled in assessing children's progress. They accurately identify and share with other staff the next steps children need to take in learning. However, children are entering Year 1 with underdeveloped skills in reading and writing. Staff do not plan carefully enough so that all areas of the provision, including activities planned outdoors, help children develop these specific skills as rapidly as they should.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- children in the early years more rapidly acquire early reading and writing skills so that they enter Year 1 with greater proficiency in these areas of learning
- independent activities are carefully planned to maximise learning in all areas in the early years, including outdoors
- disadvantaged pupils in key stages 1 and 2 continue to make accelerated progress in writing to enable them to catch up with other pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the academy advisory board and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wakefield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Butcher
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your assistant principal and the executive principal throughout the day to discuss different aspects of the school's work. We visited lessons together. I met with two representatives of the academy advisory board and a representative of the academy trust. I scrutinised documents relating to safeguarding procedures and looked at assessment information. I considered 87 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire to parents. No staff or pupils responded to the Ofsted questionnaire but I was able to talk with pupils about their learning in lessons and at lunchtime.