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1 February 2019

Mrs Susan Pollard
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Pollard

Short inspection of Marlborough Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 January 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in September 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

Since the last inspection of the predecessor school, there has been considerable turbulence. The school opened as an academy in April 2016. Several members of the board of trustees – including the previous chair – and some governors resigned following the school's opening. Over the past five terms, eight members of the teaching staff have taken maternity leave. Senior leaders have worked hard to minimise the impact of this turbulence.

Members, trustees and governors have been distracted by the academisation of the school. Valuable time has been taken up by senior leaders in dealing with issues which do not directly relate to the school's core business. However, trustees, governors and leaders have taken decisive actions that have put the school back on track. Leaders and managers have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have taken urgent and effective action to address the dip in the school's performance. Current pupils are making stronger progress, particularly in reading and mathematics. As a result, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. This is reflected in pupils' high rates of attendance, commendable behaviour and positive attitudes to learning. This is a school where pupils' achievements are celebrated. The school's annual 'festival on the field', the

art exhibition and the displays around school of pupils' work, all showcase the best of what pupils at Marlborough have to offer. Children get on well together. They are quick to lend a hand when classmates need help. They are keen to please their teachers. Pupils were keen to tell me about the wonderful trips, visits and activities they have taken part in, for example raft-building at Conwy, toasting marshmallows over a campfire and playing a giant game of tag on the school field.

Staff are proud to work at the school and have confidence in their leaders and managers. They share your vision for the school's future. Staff work exceptionally well together as a team. Staff are keen to help each other, making sure that their different experience and expertise benefit their colleagues. In particular, this helps teachers in the early days of their career, as well as new staff who join the school.

The vast majority of parents and carers are delighted with the quality of education offered by the school. They are confident that children are well cared for and safe. Parents feel able to talk to teachers if they have any worries or concerns. This parent's comment was typical of those received during the inspection: 'We are thrilled to be part of Marlborough Primary School – a school which does not rest but strives for excellence in every aspect of a child's life and education.'

Since the last inspection of the predecessor school, you have taken effective action to address the areas for improvement identified by inspectors. Comprehensive training and support ensure that the quality of teaching is at least consistently good across the school now in reading, writing and mathematics. The improvements you have made to teaching mean that almost all gaps in pupils' knowledge have been eliminated.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders carry out rigorous pre-employment checks to assure themselves that staff are suitable to work with pupils. All staff are up to date with their safeguarding training. Staff understand their responsibilities well and keep a close eye on all pupils. Any concerns are followed up assiduously by the designated safeguarding leads. The safeguarding leads personally check on how well identified pupils are getting on day to day so that they can pre-empt any emerging issues. These colleagues work closely with other agencies to put in place support for those pupils and their families who need it most.

Leaders have strengthened support to pupils eligible for the pupil premium by appointing a key worker for every disadvantaged pupil. These members of staff know their allocated pupil well. Key workers ensure that these pupils get the additional help and support they need by acting as their advocates. Although these are early days, this approach is already having a positive impact on some of the school's most vulnerable pupils.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was whether your teachers are sufficiently competent and confident to teach writing well. You have established a capable and confident team to lead the development of writing across the school. This team provides formal and informal support to teaching staff. This support and training have improved both staff confidence and subject knowledge. The quality of teaching in writing is more consistent now. Well-considered systematic teaching of writing – coupled with more precise and timely feedback – means that current pupils are making better progress. More rigorous and robust moderation means that you and your colleagues have a more accurate view of pupils’ strengths and weaknesses. You use this information well to plan lessons.
- Classrooms are filled with examples of teachers’ modelled writing, handy hints and tips, as well as the pupils’ own work. Teachers’ use of stimulating texts and video clips helps to inspire pupils to write. For example, Year 6 pupils used their knowledge of the sinking of the Titanic to produce high-quality pieces of creative writing.
- Although current pupils are making better progress than their peers over the past three years, this new approach to teaching writing is not yet securely embedded across the school. They have not fully overcome the historical legacy of weaker teaching. Teachers have started to identify opportunities across the curriculum for pupils to practise their writing. However, teachers’ expectations of pupils’ writing are not always as high in other subjects as they are in English.
- My second line of enquiry was whether you have given careful consideration to the design and implementation of the curriculum, particularly for subjects other than English and mathematics. This is an aspect of the school’s work you are revisiting this year. Across individual subjects, there is a clearer view about what leaders expect teachers to teach and pupils to learn. You are providing training and support for new and experienced subject leaders to help them carry out their roles and responsibilities well. There are curriculum plans in place for each subject. However, there is variability in how specific these plans are, so it is not always clear to teachers which subject knowledge is crucial.
- The music lead has introduced a more structured approach to help teachers deliver lessons which build pupils’ essential knowledge sequentially. Subject leaders support their colleagues to plan and deliver lessons, assess how well pupils are doing and find suitable resources. Pupils talked to me knowledgeably about the topics they have studied, for example the First World War, the Mayans and cave art. Teaching staff feel well supported by their colleagues and confident to ask for help when needed.
- A number of middle leaders are new to leadership roles and it is early days in the development of their subject plans. As yet, subject leaders have not brought their plans together to make sure that the learning in the different subjects at every stage across the school fits together coherently.
- My third line of enquiry focused on how well your school’s most able pupils achieve from their starting points, particularly in the early years and key stage 1. Over the past two years, your team has focused on improving the progress of

your middle-ability pupils. Teachers have worked hard to make sure that more of these pupils reach the expected standard by the end of the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2. This focus has paid dividends. Your youngest children are now better prepared for key stage 1. Furthermore, more children reach the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stages 1 and 2 than when the school opened.

- This year, you have started to turn your attention to helping more of your youngest children exceed the early learning goals and more older pupils to achieve greater depth and reach the higher standards. Your early years team works with feeder providers and parents to gather information about children before they join the school. Despite this, early years staff struggle to establish accurately what children know and can do when they join the school. This means that the school's information about children's starting points often does not reflect the true picture. Consequently, too much time is wasted in the first few weeks. Therefore, not enough children exceed the early learning goals by the end of Reception.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they further embed the improvements to the teaching of writing so that pupils make even better progress across the school
- they establish more reliable information about children's starting points in the early years so that children – particularly the most able – get off to a flying start
- subject plans are aligned and coordinated so that there is a more coherent journey of learning as children move through the school.

I am copying this letter to 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

Pippa Jackson Maitland
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, senior leaders, teaching and support staff, and the chair and members of the governing body. I also spoke to the chair of trustees and the independent school improvement partner. I considered the 88 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I met formally with a group of staff and considered the 30 responses to Ofsted's online survey of staff. I talked informally to pupils

throughout the school day and met formally with a group of pupils. I visited classrooms and checked on pupils' work, both in books and on wall displays. I looked at information about pupils' progress and attainment, and the school's self-evaluation and action plan, as well as a range of other documentation. I conducted a review of safeguarding, including an evaluation of the school's policies and procedures to keep pupils safe, training, recruitment checks and record-keeping.