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Mr Jonathan Lawrenson
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Dear Mr Lawrenson

Short inspection of Heswall Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 25 January 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 March 2012.

You were appointed as the new headteacher from April 2016. The deputy headteacher joined the school in September 2016.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Leaders have developed a well-informed knowledge of the needs of individual pupils and staff. Information about pupils' learning and their progress is carefully reviewed. You ask challenging questions of yourself and your team. Consequently, there is a clear understanding of what the school does well and where even more can be achieved. You have linked successfully with a cluster of other local schools to make sure that staff gain extra support and training. You also make good use of advice from the local authority to give further challenge to your work. Your high expectations lead to good behaviour. Pupils learn well and they are highly considerate towards one another.

At the previous inspection, one aspect to improve was to develop the school curriculum. Over subsequent years, previous leaders in the school achieved this necessary improvement to offer pupils more opportunities to be creative, for example, by making sure that the well-developed school grounds are used frequently in teaching. Leaders also made sure that pupils benefited from increased opportunities to develop their writing and numeracy skills across subjects. Then followed a large-scale national change in the content of the subjects schools are expected to teach.

Improvements in pupils' learning have been maintained at Heswall Primary. Across subjects, staff develop pupils' understanding of the school's values of enquiry, possibilities, independence and commitment. There is a keen emphasis on celebrating successes, learning from mistakes and following the school motto of 'Better Never Stops'. Pupils now enjoy activities as varied as studying the night-time sky, learning about barn owls and how to play tennis.

Another recommendation at the previous inspection was that teaching should be improved to identify clearly what staff aim for pupils to learn. Staff were also recommended to share with pupils how they would judge that progress was being made. This has been achieved by improving how staff plan and develop their teaching. Clear information is now shared with pupils about the next steps in their learning. Pupils understand what they should be aiming to achieve in activities.

From your review of how well pupils achieved in the school in 2016, you identified that pupils' writing is a new priority for improvement. During the inspection, you and I found that pupils' work shows that their writing is improving. We agreed that staff and leaders should now make sure that more of the most able pupils achieve greater depth in their writing. For example, we looked at provision in Reception and noted that challenge in writing activities is not sufficiently high enough for the most able children. We also agreed that given the potential abilities of pupils at this school, not enough was being expected of children's artwork in Reception.

Leaders have reviewed and improved the teaching of reading and phonics since it was recommended at the previous inspection. There has been a full overhaul of how staff work. Through investment in training and resources, there has been a strong improvement in the quality of teaching pupils to read across the school. The expertise of teachers and teaching assistants has improved significantly and many more pupils now do well in their reading. You are not complacent and you have clear plans and actions in place to raise standards further.

Safeguarding is effective.

Heswall Primary School cares for and protects pupils successfully. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Since becoming headteacher, you have reviewed the school's safeguarding arrangements with great care and determination. You have learned from the approaches taken by other schools as well as national organisations. All staff have accessed relevant child protection training and information. Regular checks are made to ensure that staff understand what to do if they should ever be concerned about the behaviour or welfare of a child, family or colleague. Prompt action is taken to link with other professionals whenever concerns arise. You have made sure that high-level expertise in safeguarding is shared across leaders. Records of your safeguarding work are maintained properly and securely. You and the previous headteacher have made sure that the school site is fully secure. Children and pupils are given regular opportunities to learn about how to keep themselves safe, for example while online, as well as when out in their local community.

Inspection findings

- You have fully included provision for the youngest children in your plans for moving the school forward. This focus was linked to the dip to below average in 2016 in the proportion of children reaching a good level of development at the end of their time in the Reception class. You have identified clearly the specific needs of that year group of children and the reasons why fewer children did well than in 2014 and 2015. Leaders are linking closely with local authority advisers to help the school improve.
- During the inspection, you and I looked at the quality of provision in Reception. We agreed that not all art activities challenge children enough. Equally, some children's previous artwork displayed on the classroom walls did not show their individual creative skills well. Some other children were being helped to write sentences but they coped too easily with this task. You recognise the need to further raise expectations of current children in the Reception class and identify how you can stretch the learning of the most able children.
- We looked together at the quality of the teaching of reading and phonics across the school. It is very clear that there has been a positive improvement in pupils' reading skills since the previous inspection. Staff are confident in using your selected phonics programme. Much careful thought is given to the grouping of pupils and to linking learning with writing activities. Better teaching has ensured that more pupils enjoy reading and make good progress in their phonics skills. For example, in 2015, pupils, including the most able and disadvantaged pupils, achieved well in reading at the end of key stage 2. While assessments in 2016 are not directly comparable as the assessments are different and expectations have been raised, pupils in Year 6, including some of the most able, again did well in their reading.
- Leaders are aware that in Year 2, while pupils attained the national average in reading in 2016, some of the most able did not attain as highly as expected. A review has been conducted to discover why the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in the Year 1 assessment of phonics dropped from average in 2014 and 2015 to below the national average in 2016. During the inspection, some of the children's reading in groups that we observed was not challenging enough for them. You and the new deputy headteacher, who is leading literacy in the school, have clear arrangements in place to build on recent gains and improve the teaching of reading further.
- Not all pupils in key stages 1 and 2 achieved well in their writing in 2016. This has been a key focus of work to improve the school. Staff now fully understand the expectations and assessment requirements of the new national curriculum. Reviews have pinpointed where pupils missed getting a higher outcome in their assessments in 2016. This information is being used fully to improve current teaching.

- Staff are working much more closely together as a team to share insights and understanding with one another. Teachers and teaching assistants are making better use of assessment during activities to move pupils on in their learning or to give extra help to deepen pupils' understanding. Strong links are in place with other schools to make sure that staff make accurate assessments of pupils' writing.
- Assessments and pupils' work show that not all of the most able pupils are achieving the standards of which they are capable. Leaders are now focusing carefully on this issue. In reviews of pupils' work, it is checked that pupils are given as many meaningful opportunities to write in their history and geography as much as in their literacy activities. Staff now give pupils much more worthwhile reasons to write, for example to contact the school you link with in Uganda.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- expectations for the achievement of children in the early years are raised, including in their creative development and for the most able children in their writing
- staff improve the learning for the most able pupils in key stages 1 and 2 to help them achieve a greater depth in their writing.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, you and I observed teaching and spoke with pupils in a sample of classes. I met with you and other leaders to discuss your reviews of the school and your plans for improvement. We discussed the school's arrangements to care for and protect pupils. I reviewed evidence of checks made by the school on the suitability of adults to work with children and pupils. I spoke to some staff about their work. You and I looked at examples of pupils' work. I heard some pupils read. I spoke to some parents as they brought their children to school at the start of the day. I considered 120 responses to a recent school survey of parents' views of the school. I considered 40 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View. I met with a parent governor and with the chair of the governing body.

The inspection was observed by an Ofsted Inspector, who played no part in the judgements made about the school by HMI.