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Mrs Cara Fahy
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Dear Mrs Fahy

Short inspection of Magdalen Gates Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 November 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

You, senior leaders and governors have successfully managed a period of considerable change since the last inspection. For example, there have been a number of changes in teaching staff, including key leadership roles, and a rise in the proportion of pupils joining the school at different times in key stage 2. This had an impact on published data at the end of Year 6 in 2017, because some pupils had only been at the school for a short time before the national curriculum tests and a few of these pupils were new to speaking English.

You have responded rapidly to these challenges. For example, you have strengthened systems to check pupils' attainment on entry to the school and the progress they make from their starting points. In addition, you have appointed a specialist education assistant (teaching assistant) to work with pupils new to the English language. Consequently, teachers identify any barriers to learning and you make sure support is put in place to help pupils make the progress of which they are capable. Current progress information, including work in pupils' books, indicates that most pupils are making good progress in mathematics and writing in key stage 2.

The governors provide strong challenge to you and school leaders. They know the school well because of their regular visits to evaluate the impact of school improvement initiatives. This year, both you and the governors have focused mainly

on checking improvements in pupils' writing and mathematics. As a result, you have not closely checked pupils' progress in developing phonic skills or whether other initiatives introduced since the last inspection, for example the new handwriting approach, are fully embedded in teachers' daily practice.

Although you have successfully improved the quality of teaching, the first area for improvement given at the last inspection, you have not fully addressed the second area for improvement, which concerned accelerating the progress pupils make in acquiring early literacy skills in Reception, Years 1 and 2.

Parents are very pleased with the quality of education their children receive at the school. For example, one parent wrote: 'The staff are approachable and always make the time to speak with you and listen to your questions or concerns. My children have all been extremely happy at Magdalen Gates and continue to progress well. They love coming to school every day. I would not hesitate in recommending this school. The school is very diverse and completely inclusive to children with special needs and children with English as an additional language. They are particularly supportive to young carers. I cannot praise the staff enough!'

Most of the 31 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, were positive. A few parents find your robust systems for encouraging regular attendance uncomfortable. However, the school's systems include effective rewards for good attendance and result in attendance that is well above the national average.

Pupils love coming to school. For example, pupils told me: 'I like everything because it's fun and I really like maths' and 'I like the awards we get like golden awards and chance cards. Teachers always listen to you and help you if you are stuck.'

Safeguarding is effective.

All safeguarding processes and procedures are in place and meet requirements. Staff receive regular and effective training that includes discussion of recent safeguarding scenarios and how staff should respond.

You have exceptionally strong systems in place to ensure that all pupils are safe, including seven designated safeguarding leads, three of whom cover the breakfast and after school clubs. You keep a very careful track of any concerns raised by pupils. The new online system ensures that concerns are carefully logged and all staff kept informed. Staff are confident in using the system. You also keep a careful record of both positive and negative behaviour incidents.

Pupils say they feel very safe at school because they have each selected five adults they feel happy to talk to about any worries they may have at any time. You have recently appointed a pastoral support education assistant who is a trained counsellor. Staff and pupils speak very highly of the support she provides and the positive impact this has on their confidence and well-being.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was to check whether boys' progress in reading and writing in key stage 2 has improved. Writing is currently a key improvement focus for the school. You and the English leader carried out a curriculum audit last year and decided to change the school's approach to teaching writing in key stage 2. For example, from the start of this school year, pupils have daily grammar lessons and teachers have higher expectations for what pupils, especially boys, can achieve in writing. The English leader and I scrutinised boys' written work in English and other subjects and this indicates strong progress in the quality of the content and structure of their writing. However, we also saw that the quality of their handwriting and presentation in their books is variable. In addition, we noticed that when teachers write comments in pupils' books they do not write in the school's agreed handwriting style. The English leader gave training to all staff in the teaching of handwriting when the new approach was introduced but, due to the greater focus on improving the quality of content, has not had the opportunity to revisit the teaching of handwriting.
- The school's current assessment information indicates that boys are making good progress from their starting points in reading in key stage 2. However, there does not appear to be a clear rationale for the use of reading journals. Neither does there appear to be a whole-school approach to, or expectation of, how pupils should check the meaning of new vocabulary they come across when they are reading on their own.
- My second line of enquiry was around how effectively you are raising boys' attainment in writing. I have already mentioned the effective changes to the curriculum. You have also raised teachers' expectations by ensuring they have a good working knowledge of national curriculum age-related expectations. For example, writing and reading expectations are placed in pupils' writing books so pupils can also check how well they are getting on. The new half-termly pupil progress meetings are sharply focused on attainment as well as progress. You and the staff know pupils and their families well and, if circumstances impact on pupils' attainment and progress, you have strong support programmes in place to help pupils catch up.
- My third line of enquiry was about girls achieving their best in mathematics in key stage 2. You have identified this issue in your current improvement plan and the mathematics leader has provided training to help teachers ensure that girls participate as confidently as boys do in mathematics lessons. We visited all the key stage 2 classes to observe mathematics teaching and girls were as keen as boys to answer the teachers' questions and take part in lessons. The mathematics leader and I scrutinised girls' mathematics books. We saw evidence that girls explain their working out and give reasons why they choose particular approaches to solving mathematical problems. We also noted that the presentation of mathematics work is variable across key stage 2. For example, pupils do not consistently use a ruler to draw straight lines.
- My fourth line of enquiry was about the school's approach to teaching systematic synthetic phonics. You have put in place a new phonic reading scheme that is helping to improve pupils' progress. However, some pupils are moved on to the

next book before they have securely learned the words in their previous book. Currently, you are using a mixture of programmes for phonics teaching from Reception to the end of Year 2. Consequently, pupils are not making sufficiently rapid progress from their starting points in learning to read. The early years and reading leader has identified that this is an area for improvement. She is putting plans in place to ensure teachers have effective materials to support the teaching of phonics, that staff have effective training in using the new materials and that staff are clear about the rationale for how pupils are grouped in phonics lessons.

- My final line of enquiry was to check the progress of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and those pupils who speak English as an additional language. The coordinator for pupils with SEN and/or disabilities (SENCo) attends all pupil progress meetings and evaluates carefully if pupils who are not making sufficient progress have a special educational need and/or disability. Those pupils identified have a carefully designed support plan monitored by the SENCo. You have also set up a special class taught by the SENCo for pupils with significant needs. Consequently, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points.
- Your specialist education assistant for pupils who speak English as an additional language has a robust programme that ensures pupils rapidly learn to speak, read and write in English. I spoke to several pupils in key stage 2 who speak confidently about how welcoming the school is and how quickly they learned English because of the effective support they receive. Your current assessment information and pupils' written work indicates that pupils who speak English as an additional language make good progress from their starting points in reading, writing and mathematics.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school implements one systematic, synthetic phonic programme to support the teaching of phonics from Reception to the end of Year 2
- there is a clear rationale for the use of reading journals and that teachers carefully track the reading choices of pupils in key stage 2
- all new initiatives, for example the teaching of handwriting and presentation, are fully embedded in teachers' practice and have a positive impact on accelerating pupils' progress and raising their attainment.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Winyard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with you, the deputy headteacher, the SENCo, subject leaders, the specialist education assistant for pupils who speak English as an additional language, the governors, a representative from the local authority, the staff, pupils and parents.

We observed learning and teaching in all classes. I read with pupils at the early stages of learning to read in Reception, and lower-prior-attaining readers in key stage 2.

I scrutinised a range of documents, including your self-evaluation and school improvement development plan. I scrutinised pupils' mathematics books and pupils' writing in English and other subjects with your English and mathematics leaders. I scrutinised a range of safeguarding documentation and a sample of pupil files. I scrutinised 31 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, 27 responses to the online staff questionnaire and 79 responses to the online pupil questionnaire.