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Mr Ian Read  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Read

### **Short inspection of Watercliffe Meadow Community Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 14 May 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 the school was judged to be good in July 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Since the last inspection, you have continued to build on the strengths in pupils' welfare and personal development. Pupils are proud of their school and feel well cared for because staff have a considerate and nurturing approach. Parents and carers highly value the school's community feel. Relationships are built on trust and mutual respect and pupils respond by having positive attitudes to their learning.

At the last inspection, you were tasked with further improving the quality of teaching so that standards by the end of key stage 2 continued to improve. Since that time, you have further developed the model for staff development. This is enabling staff to be reflective about the impact of their teaching on pupils' learning. Consequently, staff feel valued and supported to continually improve their practice.

Pupils make progress that consistently reflects the rate seen nationally by the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2018, pupils' Year 6 attainment was in line with the national average in writing and mathematics. However, pupils' attainment in reading at the end of key stages 1 and 2 was below the national average. Additionally, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has been consistently below the national average over time. Leaders have been too slow to respond to this weakness. Phonics and early reading had not been a priority in the school's plans

for improvement until they were recently highlighted in a review by the local authority. Staff are clear about the phonic knowledge they expect pupils to learn at key points throughout Reception and key stage 1. However, too many pupils, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are not receiving effective enough support to help them keep up with the programme's pace. This leads to large numbers of pupils entering key stage 2 unable to read with fluency and struggling to access their learning across the curriculum.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders are passionate about the importance of safeguarding. You have made sure that procedures are effective and records are detailed and of high quality. A committed team keeps a close check on vulnerable pupils. This makes sure that pupils receive the most appropriate support, which includes the use of external agencies when necessary. Well-established systems keep pupils' safety as a top priority. Training is successful in helping staff to recognise and respond to signs of concern. Leaders also provide important safeguarding updates for all adults in the regular staff briefings.

Relationships are strong between staff and pupils. Pupils value the caring approach from staff. This contributes to pupils' safety and positive attitudes to learning. Consequently, because of such supportive relationships, pupils are confident that staff will resolve any issues they may encounter. Pupils say that they feel safe and that bullying is rare.

### **Inspection findings**

- Leaders have begun to take steps to improve the curriculum for phonics. The phonics programme has been adapted to give oral blending and segmenting more prominence. Additionally, leaders identified the need to prioritise children's ability to hear sounds effectively by the end of Nursery to give them a strong start to Reception. However, the curriculum for phonics does not include sufficiently frequent opportunities for pupils to practise their spelling and letter formation. This is leading to weaknesses in pupils' handwriting that persist throughout key stage 1. Pupils' spelling continues to be a weakness throughout key stage 2.
- Key stage 1 staff do not have high enough expectations of pupils' letter formation and handwriting. They do not routinely check for quality and accuracy in pupils' work. This means that pupils' errors go unnoticed and bad habits become ingrained. Consequently, many pupils finish Year 1 without having secured the national curriculum expectations. In Year 2, staff focus on the Year 2 curriculum without making sure that pupils have secured their knowledge and understanding from the previous year. For example, in Year 2 pupils' books, lack of finger spaces and incorrect letter formation persist from the start of the school year and show little or no improvement by May.
- Ongoing phonic assessments are detailed and provide staff with a clear picture of the gaps in pupils' knowledge. Support is in place for pupils who have fallen behind the pace of the phonics programme, and is tailored to specific gaps in

pupils' learning. However, the support is not consistent with the national curriculum and is not effective enough at helping pupils to catch up and keep up with the curriculum expectations.

- Furthermore, when pupils reach Year 3, their phonic knowledge is not closely checked. This is despite a large proportion of these pupils not having met the Year 1 expected standard for phonics by the time they start key stage 2. This group of pupils are not able to read with enough fluency and accuracy and are not getting enough practice to help them quickly improve. These pupils have great difficulty in reading the information they are given in lessons. This is not only demoralising for them, but hinders them in accessing the wider curriculum.
- Adults confuse pupils by asking them to use strategies other than phonics to read unknown words, for example, guessing words from the pictures. This is because the books pupils read at home and in school are not matched to pupils' phonic knowledge. Leaders have not made sure that the books that pupils read in school and at home are phonically decodable and contain only the sounds they know or the common exception words to which they have been exposed.
- Leaders have not made sure that all staff who teach reading have the expertise to do so effectively and in line with national curriculum requirements. Staff have worked together to improve their phonics teaching. They have observed each other, planned together and identified how to make improvements. However, the impact of this has been hindered by a lack of staff expertise in what effective phonics practice should consist of.
- Leaders are, however, working hard to foster pupils' love of reading. The 101 reads, a relaunched library, badges to encourage reading mileage and regular author visits are examples of how leaders are determined to establish a positive reading culture in school. Consequently, pupils talk about books they enjoy and how they choose to read regularly at home. They enjoy the high-quality texts that teachers read to them. Pupils appreciate how this helps them to develop their vocabulary and to consider selecting books from a wider range of authors.
- Absence and persistent absence have been reducing over time, but remain weaker than the national average. Overall attendance figures are adversely affected by the poorer attendance of boys, pupils with SEND and pupils who speak English as an additional language. Leaders' actions are beginning to have a more positive impact on pupils' attendance this year.
- The rate of fixed-term exclusions has previously been above average, including for schools with similar levels of deprivation. However, leaders have developed secure systems for tracking pupils' behaviour over time. Issues are now more quickly identified and effectively addressed. Support for pupils has proved highly successful and fixed-term exclusions are now rare.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all pupils can read with the accuracy and fluency needed for them to access the whole curriculum

- staff have the necessary expertise to teach phonics consistently and in line with national curriculum requirements
- the curriculum for phonics incorporates frequent opportunities for pupils to practise letter formation and spelling
- in key stage 1, staff have high expectations of pupils' written work so that errors are quickly addressed to help pupils secure their basic skills
- the support for pupils who are not keeping up with the pace of the phonics curriculum is more effective in helping them to quickly catch up
- the books that pupils read in the early stages of learning to read are closely matched to their phonic knowledge
- pupils' attendance, including for groups of pupils who have previously been absent too often, continues to improve so that it is more consistent with the national average.

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

Yours sincerely

Kirsty Godfrey  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, subject leaders and the safeguarding team. I also met with two members of the governing body, including the chair, and I met with a representative of the local authority. I evaluated documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan, attendance records, and information about safeguarding.

We visited classrooms together to observe teaching and learning and scrutinise pupils' work. I listened to four pupils reading. I spoke with several parents and carers at the start of the school day and considered the 33 response to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I talked to a sample of pupils and a range of staff, and also took into consideration the 38 responses to the staff survey and the 49 responses to the pupil survey.