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Mark Devereux
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Devereux

Short inspection of Loddon Infant and Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 8 December 2015 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 May 2011.

This school continues to be good.

At Loddon Infant and Nursery School everyone is passionate about learning. As we walked from one classroom to the next we saw pupils whose eyes were fixed on their teachers, listening intently to helpful explanations, or talking enthusiastically to each other about teachers' questions, or absorbed in a variety of fun activities. For example, in the Reception class a small group of boys and girls were re-enacting their Christmas play with the nativity figures, including singing all the songs! Fifteen months ago this was a school that had lost its direction. Pupils' behaviour was not good and parents were concerned about whether this was the right school for their children. You and the staff have worked tirelessly to change attitudes to learning, so much so that the pupils have come up with their own motto, 'At our school to try your best, *is* the best and you might get in the Gold Book.' During the inspection a Year 1 pupil came to the office to show you his work and positively glowed with pride as his name was written in the Gold Book.

Parents have got to know you as head of Loddon Junior School, so when you took over at this school, they had confidence that you would lead the school well. Many talked about the difference you have made in a short space of time. One parent said, 'The atmosphere is so much lighter recently; everyone is very positive.' Other parents were keen to tell me about how happy their children are and that if they have a concern you listen to them and take action straight away. One parent was really enthusiastic about the teachers, 'Staff are very approachable. My children have made a lot of progress this year.' Another talked about the excellent support that has helped her daughter to settle in, 'She's a determined character and they've

taken time to get to know her and she's doing well.' Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents to express their views of the school) echoes the highly positive comments from parents during the inspection.

Pupils love their school. 'We have nice teachers. They always give us a helping hand if we're stuck and don't know what to do.' They really enjoy playtimes because, 'There are lots of friendly children and they let you join in their games.' The school council members are dedicated to making their school the best it can be. 'We want to make sure everyone has the best playtime so we've introduced the buddy bench. We want to have a blanket there so children don't get cold and a book so playground buddies can read to them as well.' Pupils say there is occasionally 'naughtiness' but adults sort this out very quickly. Pupils have a good understanding of how the behaviour policy works and like the different stages. 'If you get on red you have to go and see the headteacher!'

The governors have worked exceptionally hard to make sure this stays a good school. Following the resignation of the infant school headteacher in January 2014, they gained community agreement to federation under yourself as headteacher. The local authority instigated a pre-federation audit in July 2014. Your vision for creating one school for pupils from age three to age 11 is working very well. You make sure staff expertise and experience are shared effectively across both schools. This approach and the good support and training staff have received from the local authority have made a huge difference to the quality of teaching. Last year, and for that year only, standards dipped below the national average at the end of Year 2. Now pupils are back on track to do much better in 2016, with most reaching age-related expectations and a good proportion doing even better than this. You and the staff have successfully addressed the issues from the last inspection.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the governors make sure that pupils are safe at school. All safeguarding arrangements are suitable and meet current requirements. There are good systems in place to record incidents effectively, and records are sufficiently detailed and of good quality. Staff training is fully up to date and they know what to do if there are any concerns about a pupil. You are working effectively with social services and giving good support to several families where a child is deemed to be 'in need'. The work of your pastoral and parent support workers is outstanding. Now the two schools are federated, both staff work across the two schools. The pastoral support worker focuses on meeting the social and emotional needs of pupils and has a small group she meets with every week. Teachers say this makes a huge difference to pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour towards other pupils. The family support worker works very effectively with parents who find difficulty in getting their children to school on time every day. As a result, persistent absence has reduced. However, you recognise that attendance overall is not high enough and that you must take immediate and robust action to ensure that pupils attend school every day.

The website contains most of the required information. Most policies have been updated this term but are not yet on the website.

Inspection findings

- Since you took over the leadership of the school just over a year ago there have been many highly effective changes. You and the deputy headteacher (who started at the same time) have worked with the staff to make sure pupils' learning and welfare are at the heart of everything you do. Together, you evaluated what was working and what was not working in the school. You already had concerns about the accuracy of teacher assessment at the end of Year 2. The baseline assessment you put in place at the junior school highlighted that this Year 2 assessment had been overgenerous and inaccurate for a number of years. This was corroborated at the junior school's Ofsted inspection. You rightly called in the local authority to support you and the staff in overhauling assessment systems. You provided good training to staff about how to accurately assess pupils' work. You and the staff have worked with other schools locally and with the junior school to make sure teachers' views of how well pupils are making progress in mathematics, reading and writing are in line with the requirements of the new national curriculum.
- You have used the expertise of teachers in both schools to good effect. For example, the mathematics leader from the junior school has given training to teachers. They have observed him teach and he has set high expectations for how pupils are taught and how they present their work in their mathematics books. As a result, pupils' progress in mathematics is accelerating and they have done a great deal of good-quality work from the start of this term. Teachers' planning, an issue from the last inspection, has improved. Teachers are clear about what pupils should learn by the end of a lesson and choose effective teaching strategies and resources to achieve this.
- The pupil premium champion from the junior school has helped set up the same effective monitoring systems used by the junior school. As a result every pupil eligible for pupil premium (additional government funding to support disadvantaged pupils) now has an individual profile which sets out their specific learning needs and the individual support they receive. Teaching assistants have had the necessary training to help them deliver the support programmes. The impact of this support is checked very carefully to make sure it is making a difference and pupils are catching up with all pupils nationally. Individual profiles are also in place for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, and these pupils are making good progress from their starting points.
- You and the governors have invested a lot of money in new reading books and in training for teachers in how to teach phonics (letters and the sounds they make). The well-planned, daily direct teaching of phonics from Reception to Year 2 has improved pupils' spelling as well as their

reading. The pupils who read to me had a good grasp of how to use their knowledge of letter sounds to work out new words when reading aloud. Pupils do not get the same very structured approach when learning to write their letters. Consequently, the quality of handwriting is not always good. The literacy leader has recognised the need for a whole-school approach to letter formation so that parents can also use this when working with their children at home. In addition, teachers do not always model neat handwriting in pupils' books. Currently there is not sufficient specific and direct teaching in the nursery, either of phonics or of letter formation, to help children develop the key skills they need so that they are ready for the Reception class.

- The federation process has enabled both schools to share a governing body. Governors are very experienced and dedicated to making sure the infant and nursery school makes the same good progress as the junior school. They are knowledgeable about their role and the chair and vice-chair are highly challenging to you and senior leaders in both schools; no stone is left unturned. They also give a good level of support to you, making regular visits to check on how things are going and carrying out an annual and detailed survey of parents' views. 'There has been a vast improvement this year from last year. Parents are really on board with what we are trying to achieve here.'
- You are crystal clear about the next steps for improving the school, although written evaluations and improvement plans are not always precise or sharply focused.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- pupils' attendance continues to improve and the school works with the local authority to ensure pupils are in school every day
- the school agrees an approach to teaching letter formation and handwriting that is used by all teachers and parents
- teachers in the early years make sure there is a good balance between direct teaching of key skills and the learning activities that children can choose for themselves.

Yours sincerely

Julie Winyard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher, staff, governors and a representative from the local authority. In addition, the subject leader for mathematics and pupil premium champion, parents, pupils and the school council were also interviewed. A wide range of documentation, including information about pupil outcomes, was scrutinised. All teachers were observed either teaching phonics, writing or mathematics. Some child-initiated activities were observed in the Nursery and Reception classes. Pupils' books were scrutinised in lessons and a sample, in more detail, with the mathematics leader and Nursery and Reception teachers.