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Mrs Helen Redmond
Executive Headteacher
North Thoresby Primary Academy
High Street
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Dear Mrs Redmond

Short inspection of North Thoresby Primary Academy

Following my visit to the school on 24 May 2016, 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 November 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The organisation of the school is different from what it was at the time of that inspection because the school converted to being an academy in July 2013, when it became a member of the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET). The school is federated with another local school and shares the same governing body, senior and subject leaders.

You and the assistant headteacher have been in post for less than one year, but have wasted no time in identifying and implementing ways in which to improve the school. You have prioritised actions that will improve pupils' outcomes and have monitored the impact of those actions closely. Some of the initiatives, such as the introduction of a new pupil assessment system, have not been as instantly successful as you expected, but you have been quick to adjust and improve them.

The school has benefited from a well-planned programme of support provided by the AET, which has adjusted a number of its working practices to meet the needs of this small rural school and its leaders. Governors have used their knowledge of the school and information on pupils' outcomes to hold you to account for the school's performance. There are some inconsistencies in aspects of teaching, learning and assessment across the school, particularly in handwriting, the presentation in pupils' books, and the feedback given to pupils on how to improve their work.

This is because the messages school leaders give to staff are not always precise, or monitored closely enough. Insufficient detail in the plans for school development means that it is difficult for leaders to hold colleagues fully to account for their actions.

Pupils from Year 6 with whom I spoke provided a good insight into the quality of pupils' learning over time. During a discussion about the Mayans, a history topic, not only were the pupils able to share key facts, but they were also able to discuss the relevance of this ancient civilisation to the range and availability of the food eaten today. The school's curriculum is well designed and inspires pupils and their teachers because leaders act on the views of pupils. Leaders use termly reviews of pupils' opinions about the most recent topics in the curriculum to improve future learning opportunities for pupils of all ages. Year 6 pupils are particularly excited about the forthcoming 'crime and punishment' topic. This is because they chose the subject and have helped to plan their learning. For example, a Year 6 pupil told the inspector, 'It means we are more willing to learn about it because we have been involved.' Another commented, 'We chose crime and punishment. It is important that you know what your country's culture and history are like and how these are different from other cultures.'

Parents of younger pupils are full of praise for the quality of communication between the school and home. They value the contact and preparation the school makes before their children enter the early years. A small number of parents expressed concerns about the rate of teaching staff turnover but evidence points to leaders responding quickly to minimise the disruption to pupils, despite having little control over unexpected staffing issues.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors ensure that all safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and records are detailed. Staff and governors undertake training regularly and so ensure that their knowledge and practice are current, for example in child protection and the identification and prevention of extremism. Policies provide staff with clear advice and procedures and leaders make sure that staff have read and understood these policies.

By Year 6, pupils have been taught to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations, such as when riding their bicycles on the roads or when using the internet. They know the importance of these lessons, with one pupil commenting, for example, 'Every child has to be ready for new things.' Year 6 pupils told the inspector that bullying and name-calling are rare and they believe that adults will deal with any issues immediately and effectively. They firmly believe that the school is a safe place, with one pupil saying, for example, 'I would recommend a small school like this, where each child is safe because we all know each other.'

Inspection findings

- Leaders and governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Their evaluation of the school's performance is detailed and firmly based on available evidence.

- Governors have a good knowledge of the school because leaders provide a wide range of information and this allows them to ask challenging questions of those leaders. Governors check the accuracy of leaders' information through visits to the school and the scrutiny of pupils' work.
- Governors work effectively with the AET to ensure that there is clarity over their roles and responsibilities, and this is helped by a comprehensive scheme of delegation.
- Children typically enter the school at levels of development which are broadly similar to those expected for their age. Recent external moderation of pupils' outcomes has identified that teacher assessment is accurate and that the vast majority of children are making progress which is at least good from their starting points.
- Leaders were quick to identify that outcomes in the Year 1 national phonics screening showed a decline in 2015 and that end of key stage 1 outcomes were not as strong as previous years in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders took appropriate steps to address these issues and work in pupils' books shows that pupils are currently making progress which is often good.
- Pupils' work shows that they are making good progress in key stage 2. In Years 5 and 6, pupils' progress is particularly strong because teachers follow school policies on feedback to pupils, their handwriting and the presentation of their work. These aspects of pupils' work are less consistent in other classes and this is because leaders have not been clear enough to teachers about the need for consistency of approach throughout the school. Neither have they monitored this aspect of teaching and learning enough.
- By Year 6, pupils are able to have well-developed conversations about what they have learned, while expressing well-informed opinions. During discussions with the inspector, it became clear that the school's values are well embedded by the time pupils are preparing to move to secondary school, and they are well prepared for that transition as a result.
- Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is very strong and they are keen to talk about the range of religions about which they have learned. On more than one occasion, pupils told the inspector that it was 'important to be open-minded about other religions and cultures'.
- They enjoy the roles of responsibility that come with age, such as junior road safety officers, and this also exposes them to British values such as service to others. Pupils' attendance is consistently in line with or above the national average.
- Leaders' plans for school improvement are in place and are broadly appropriate. They are not specific enough because they often refer to federation improvement rather than specific improvements for this school. They also lack sufficient detail to ensure that individuals can be held fully to account for their actions in securing school improvement.
- The school has received effective support from the AET since converting to be an academy. School leaders speak highly of the quality of support for literacy, mathematics and staff employment issues, and the speed with which the trust responds to the school's requests for support.
- The AET sponsors academies nationally, and its officers quickly identified that North Thoresby is very different from the majority of their other academies. It has purchased a minibus to ensure that pupils are not disadvantaged by the school's rural location.

- Staff development programmes link leaders and teachers to other AET academies in the West Midlands and Humberside, and this is supporting accurate assessment of pupils' work.
- Trust officers challenge school leaders effectively about pupils' performance and the effective use of resources and the trust provides a wide range of curriculum and assessment support materials, which are helping to improve pupils' outcomes.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- senior leaders' plans for school improvement are more explicit in identifying the members of staff responsible for actions and the dates by which those actions must be completed
- senior leaders ensure that messages and instructions to the staff are precise and monitor the impact more closely.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen McMullan
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the assistant headteacher, three governors, a representative from the AET, parents and pupils from Year 6. I considered responses of parents from Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and from staff and pupils through the online surveys that they completed. You and I visited all classes in the school, spending a short time in each, and looked at a sample of pupils' work together. I looked at a range of documents, including an evaluation of the school's performance and plans for further improvement, information on how the pupil premium is spent, and a number of policy documents, including those for child protection and special educational needs.