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Dear Mrs Keen

Short inspection of Taxal and Fernilee CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 September 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 the school was judged to be good in April 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your high standards and ambition for the school have led to demonstrable improvements since the last inspection. The pupils across the school have continued to improve their skills and knowledge in English and mathematics; pupils' outcomes are improving quickly, including in the early years, and compare favourably with national standards.

The school's values, which encompass a commitment to the community, to pupils' achievement, and respect towards oneself and others and the environment, are palpable throughout the school. The school is highly regarded locally and levels of parental involvement are high. One parent remarked, 'this school is calm and engaging', when explaining the essence of the school's success.

Pupils show very good attitudes towards their studies and teachers are committed to improving their practice. Teachers model respectful behaviour day to day and so pupils conduct themselves in a similar way. Pupils are well mannered and thoughtful towards each other; they are especially sensitive towards pupils with additional needs.

The school takes pride in having a global outlook. Pupils regularly learn about different cultures and peoples from around the world. You and the leadership team enjoy a high degree of support from staff and parents.

You have rightly prioritised writing, especially in relation to boys, as a key area of improvement across the school, as improvements in this area of the school have been variable since the last inspection. As a result of the strategies that you have implemented, pupils' achievement in writing has improved dramatically, according to the latest 2016 unvalidated key stage 2 test results. Pupils' writing skills have also improved in most other year groups and there is now very little difference between the achievement of boys and girls.

The way teachers assess pupils' work has improved. The pupils are clear about how they can improve their work. This marks an important development since the last inspection. External reviews of the school praise the school for its rigorous approach towards checking that pupils' assessments in English and mathematics are accurate. Nevertheless, while the school's systems for tracking pupils' performance in English and mathematics are robust, pupils' progress in other subjects is not monitored so well. Consequently, the school is not clear about pupils' progress across all subjects in the curriculum.

New leaders for subjects such as science, physical education and modern foreign languages are developing the curriculum and are devising suitable ways to assess pupils' work in each year group. New subject leadership appointments are proving successful. As a result of your guidance, these leaders understand their roles and responsibilities more clearly.

You have identified the achievement of the most able pupils as a key area to be monitored in your plan. Teachers have developed their lesson planning specifically to challenge the most able pupils. However, too few pupils from this group, especially the most able disadvantaged pupils, achieve the high standards they should, especially in reading. Not enough of the children who exceeded a good level of development in the early years achieve the higher standards at the end of key stages 1 and 2. The progress of the most able pupils is not monitored rigorously enough to make sure that all pupils reach the highest standards of which they are capable.

You have developed innovative and effective approaches towards supporting disadvantaged pupils. 'Key workers', who have overall responsibility for an individual pupil, are proving effective. This is because these staff liaise closely with the class teachers to ensure that any gaps in learning are filled quickly. Most disadvantaged pupils make good progress and achieve better than other pupils nationally in most subjects, as a result. Their achievement is not as high, however, as that of other pupils in the school, especially in literacy.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the designated safeguarding leader (DSL) work effectively to ensure that arrangements for safeguarding are robust. As a result of regular training, staff are suitably vigilant and knowledgeable regarding safeguarding matters.

Referrals made to the local authority are prompt and you and the DSL follow up individual cases meticulously. Staff have a deep understanding of the needs of individual pupils. Pupils speak confidently about being able to approach any member of staff if they have concerns. They feel very safe in the school. Bullying is rare. Parents and staff overwhelmingly concur with this view.

All staff have undertaken Channel Awareness training to support their understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism. Pupils are given opportunities regularly to discuss and to consider topical issues during the daily collective worship. The school engenders democratic values well and these values form an important part of the school's approach to preventing pupils from being drawn towards extremist views. The governing body carries out its monitoring duties diligently.

Inspection findings

- You have evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the school accurately. The school's improvement plan is monitored and evaluated rigorously. You acknowledge the areas for further development in relation to the achievement of some of the most able pupils and monitoring the progress of pupils in the foundation subjects.
- The governing body is very committed to improving its practice. It has undertaken training and development courses to improve the members' understanding of information about pupils' performance. It provides support and high levels of challenge to you, which has helped to keep standards and expectations high.
- The governing body carries out a comprehensive annual check on the school's progress towards its targets. It holds you and other leaders suitably to account.
- It monitors the school's use of government funding well. In so doing, it keeps a sharp eye on value for money and requires clear evidence of impact when money is spent. Governors recognise that the reports regarding the impact of the pupil premium and sport premium spending should comply with the latest government guidance, as currently they do not.
- Pupils read widely and often. Reading record books show that staff hear pupils read often and parents are encouraged to support reading at home.
- Pupils decode unfamiliar words confidently because the teaching of phonics is effective. All pupils regularly achieve the phonics standard by the end of key stage 1. The most able readers say that they are frequently 'engrossed' with their reading books.
- The school's teaching of grammar, spelling and punctuation is successful. Pupils consistently achieve high standards in this aspect of English at the end of key stage 2.
- The very few pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well. They make good progress in writing and mathematics and their progress in reading is improving.

- The recently appointed early years leader has made important improvements to the provision for children in this phase of the school. Resources are chosen carefully to enable pupils, especially boys, to develop their literacy skills and creativity. The early years leader ensures that nurseries from which the children join the school provide detailed information about children before they join the school. As a result, children settle quickly.
- More children achieved a good level of development and exceeded the expected standard in 2016 than in previous years.
- You have ensured that the school's approach to teaching writing is more coherent. The themed writing projects across the school have captured pupils' imaginations well.
- The school's astute selection of reading materials has been key to boys' literacy improvements. The school's introduction of 'writing conferences', during which teachers provide personalised feedback, has been a successful strategy in accelerating pupils' progress.
- You, the assistant headteacher and the lead practitioner monitor the quality of teaching regularly through lesson observations and examining pupils' work books. Pupils' progress and the presentation of their work are checked meticulously to ensure that they comply with school policies. The quality of teachers' marking and feedback is now more consistent across the school than it was at the time of the last inspection.
- You have managed the teachers' performance effectively, which has helped to improve practice and pupils' progress.
- Pupils accept other's differences readily. Both staff and parents praise pupils' relationships with one another, especially during break- and lunchtimes. The school's 'buddy' system, through which older pupils pair up with younger ones and act as friends and mentors, is successful in helping to foster a harmonious and inclusive atmosphere around the school.
- The local authority continues to provide support for the school by verifying the accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils' work and providing school improvement advice and guidance. It has a high regard for your leadership and has recruited you to act as an associate school improvement adviser for local schools, in order to support their school improvement. You work closely with the main local secondary school to ensure that transition arrangements between primary and secondary schools are smooth and effective.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school's strategy for the most able pupils, especially for disadvantaged pupils, is developed further, so that more pupils reach the high standards in each year group in English and mathematics
- pupils' progress in all foundation subjects is monitored and tracked more rigorously.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the diocese of Chester, and the director of children's services for Derbyshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Zarina Connolly
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with parents at the start of the day, and I met with you, subject leaders, the chair of the governing body, a governor with safeguarding responsibilities and the school's local authority representative. I heard pupils from most year groups read and spoke with them about their school experience. You and I visited all classes and examined pupils' work books. In addition, I scrutinised the school's safeguarding arrangements and records, including the single central register. I evaluated the school's documentation in relation to pupils' performance, improvement planning, external reviews, governing body meetings and monitoring records. I took account of 74 responses to Ofsted's free-text survey and 16 staff questionnaires. There were no responses from pupils to Ofsted's online survey. The school's website is not compliant with the current government statutory guidance, as the pupil premium and sport premium reports are not sufficiently detailed.