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Mrs Claire Little
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Little

Short inspection of Thursby Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 6 December 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 September 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Following your appointment as headteacher, you and your team stabilised the school following a brief period of uncertainty. The strong leadership you have brought to Thursby has ensured that the good quality of education reported at the last inspection remains. You are ably supported by senior and middle leaders who share your vision and high expectations. Your ambition is embraced by your team of staff, who thrive amid a supportive culture that challenges everyone to improve. Governors are right to feel that the school has improved since the previous inspection due to a closer focus on the standard of teaching and outcomes for pupils. Their view that, 'Teaching is at the heart of what we do' is absolutely right.

The vast majority of parents are very supportive of the school and of your leadership. Parents particularly value the openness of staff and the way in which parents are made to feel welcome. Parents say that their children are happy in school. In fact, one parent told me that his son gets upset during the holidays when he realises that it isn't a school day.

The behaviour of your pupils is a delight to see. I witnessed the constant use of 'please' and 'thank you' throughout the day. Pupils greeted me as they passed with 'good morning' or 'good afternoon' and ensured that I went first through doors. This level of respect was shown to other pupils as well as adults. This is a result of the high expectations which you and your staff have for pupils' behaviour. Pupils say

that behaviour is usually very good around school. I agree with this. Pupils feel safe and in fact struggled to recall any incidents of bullying, or racist or homophobic name-calling. Pupils told me that teachers remind them to, 'Treat people how you would like to be treated.' As a result of your commitment to listening to, involving and actively engaging pupils in their learning and wider school community, the school gained the Investors in Pupils award in February 2016.

You and your team have taken action to address the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. Success in these areas is evident, despite the dip in outcomes at key stage 1 in 2016. Teachers value the opportunities that you give them for professional development and to learn from each other. They work closely with one another and with other colleagues and constantly seek to improve their teaching. They also value the feedback which they receive from senior leaders in order to improve their work. Teachers ensure that pupils understand what they are learning. They take great care to explain things and question pupils carefully to help them work out answers and correct their own work. Pupils say that teachers encourage them as work gets more difficult and help when they get 'stuck'. For example, due to the clear explanations and good questioning seen in a key stage 2 lesson, one pupil was able to explain to me that, 'You use a semi-colon when the two sentences have a strong connection.'

You, your staff and governors provide more opportunities for pupils to engage with other communities. Pupils now have the opportunity to study a wide range of cultures in the UK, Europe and the wider world. Your teachers provide opportunities for pupils to link with a school in Gambia and have pen pals from a school in France. As a result, cultural understanding is developed well through a range of stimulating activities.

The quality of the work produced by the pupils is evident in the bright, attractive environment which you provide. From three-dimensional models of landscapes to written work, teachers and teaching assistants ensure that the pupils' work is displayed for all to see. Your staff deserve credit for the way in which this is done.

It is clear that you and governors are determined to see the school go from strength to strength. Your accurate evaluation therefore identifies that there is work to do to make the school even better. You are aware that outcomes in 2016 for pupils in key stage 1 dipped from the previous two years. To address this, you have established robust plans to ensure that these pupils make accelerated progress in key stage 2. You recognise that the children who did not meet the expected standard at the end of Reception and key stage 1 also need to make accelerated progress. These plans are already making a difference and pupils currently in key stage 1, including disadvantaged pupils, are making good progress from their starting points.

Your subject leaders, across a wide range of subjects, use their ongoing monitoring and careful analysis of pupils' achievements to develop their subjects. The support which they offer to one another contributes to the broad curriculum. You ensure that subject leaders have the time and skills necessary to develop their subjects. As a result, subject leadership is strong and pupils make good progress across a wide

range of subjects.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are effective. The strong culture of safeguarding is evident across every aspect of your work. You and your staff know each pupil well, and provide high levels of nurture and support. All pupils who contributed to the inspection reported that they felt happy and safe. Parents speak positively about how well their children are looked after and how promptly staff respond to any concerns that they raise. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including while they are online. Pupils referred to the steps the school takes to keep them safe, including signs on laptops which prompt them to report anything which makes them feel uncomfortable.

Training for staff is up to date. Likewise, safeguarding policies and information on the school's website are based on the most up-to-date government guidance.

Inspection findings

- Governors ensure that the pupil premium funding is spent wisely. As a result, disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, make good progress from their starting points.
- You have a team of dedicated teaching assistants who are passionate about enabling pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to develop wider life skills. Consequently, some of your pupils receive a particularly tailored curriculum. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points.
- Pupils value the responsibilities you give them as they get older. They talked to me about how much they enjoyed acting as house captains, sports captains and librarians organising weekly story-time sessions.
- Pupils achieve well across the school because teachers know their needs and strive to meet them. One pupil reported that teachers encourage pupils to 'be the best that you can be'. This was evident in the work seen in pupils' books across the school. There is no discernible difference between the performance of girls and boys.
- Your pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, read fluently and with expression. The pupils I heard read during the inspection used phonic strategies when appropriate to help them read unfamiliar words. However, for some pupils, this high standard of fluency and expression is not matched by their ability to understand what they have read.
- The success of your focus on developing strong calculation skills in mathematics is evident in the good progress made by all groups of pupils, particularly boys. We agreed, though, that pupils are not given enough opportunity to explain and justify their thinking in mathematics. As a result, some of the most able pupils do not reach the higher standards of which they are capable.
- The most able older pupils are starting to write with flair. This is evident in

writing such as, 'As my Ford pulled off the smooth stone road, it gave a growl like a tiger thinking it wouldn't make it back.' This quality is the result of the opportunities pupils are given to write for a range of purposes and through a wide range of subjects, including history, religious education (RE) and science.

- The presence of well-established routines and high expectations means that very little learning time is lost. Teachers constantly check how well pupils are progressing and adjust their teaching during lessons to ensure that the needs of pupils are met. However, as we agreed, more challenge could be given to the most able pupils.
- Feedback provided to pupils follows the school's policy well. Consequently, pupils are able to identify what they need to improve and plan their next steps. Furthermore, feedback helps to deepen pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding across the curriculum.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and gives pupils the opportunity to succeed in a wide range of subjects. Teachers plan specific days to raise the profile of individual subjects, including history and RE. Opportunities beyond the curriculum include sports, music and residential visits. However, pupils' understanding of British values is less well developed.
- Children in the early years make good progress from their starting points and are prepared well for the challenges of Year 1. The dip in standards in 2015 has been reversed and outcomes in 2016 were much improved.
- Reception class teachers have developed a stimulating and literature-rich environment. The children love mark-making and there are some good examples of children using the opportunities provided to write for a variety of purposes. Boys and girls engage equally in this. Consequently, current children are making good progress with their writing. However, as we discussed, the classroom is not as rich in number and children have fewer opportunities to develop knowledge, skills and understanding in this area.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- The level of challenge for the most able pupils is maintained by:
 - giving pupils opportunities to explain and justify their thinking, particularly in mathematics
 - ensuring that pupils' comprehension skills are further developed so they match the high standards of fluency and expression when reading.
- British values are further promoted.

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

Yours sincerely

Tanya Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you, the assistant headteacher, subject leaders and four governors, and I spoke to a representative of the local authority. You and I visited all classes to observe learning and I looked at work in pupils' books. I met with pupils throughout the day and spoke with eight parents in the playground before school. I took into account the five responses to the pupil questionnaire and 10 comments made by parents on Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire). I heard several pupils read and observed pupils on the playground and in the dining hall. I conducted a detailed review of safeguarding, including checking policies, procedures and record-keeping. I talked to you, other staff and governors about how the school ensures that children are kept safe. I also considered a range of other documentation, including that on school improvement planning and information about pupils' progress and attainment.

Prior to the inspection, I identified a number of lines of enquiry which informed the focus of my work. These were:

- How successfully have school leaders addressed the areas for improvement from the previous inspection?
- How well is boys' learning supported in the early years, especially in writing and number, to prepare them for the challenges of Year 1?
- How effective are leaders' actions to improve the rate of boys' progress and that of middle-ability pupils in mathematics in key stage 1?
- How effective are leaders' actions to improve the rate of progress of boys at key stage 2?
- How effective is safeguarding?