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Mrs Lynn Harrison
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Dear Mrs Harrison

Short inspection of Irthington Village School

Following my visit to the school on 14 March 2017, 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 February 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your governors spoke to me about the work that has taken place since the previous inspection. You have chosen to take the lead in the early years foundation stage to ensure that staff are clear about their role in supporting the youngest children in their learning. We agreed that the next step for the school is to increase the proportion of children who attain a good level of development by the end of Reception Year.

You and the governors have a secure understanding of the strengths of the school and areas that need to be improved. Pupils' attainment in writing at the end of key stage 1 in 2016 was weaker than that in reading and mathematics. We looked in depth at current Year 2 pupils' writing and assessment information. We agreed that pupils' writing is now in line with the expected standard and that it is imperative to maintain the school's focus on securing good progress in writing across key stage 2, particularly with regard to spelling, punctuation and the presentation of written work. I agree with your view that pupils would benefit from more opportunities to produce extended pieces of writing. The work you have done with colleagues in other schools to verify teachers' assessments has been effective. You have sensibly engaged the support of an external consultant to advise, support and challenge you, your colleagues and the governing body to make sure the quality of pupils' writing improves.

The school's population has grown since the previous inspection. Governors and

parents commented that Irthington is chosen by local families and those who live further afield because of the ethos and welcome that the school offers. Governors share your clear ambition for pupils. Parents, pupils, staff and governors are very proud of their school. Governors described it as the 'heart of the community' and talked about how the school is respected by all, including members of the village community who have enriched the pupils' learning by sharing their experiences with them. Examples of this are projects commemorating the first world war and celebrating Quakerism. Parents value the friendly, nurturing and welcoming feel of the school. They also feel that staff are very approachable and that concerns will be dealt with quickly. Pupils describe their teachers as being kind and helpful. They enjoy the activities they have access to and especially value the friends they make. They said that friends help each other 'make up' when there is any 'falling out'.

Safeguarding is effective.

You ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school's records are detailed and of high quality. As the lead for safeguarding, you show due diligence of care for pupils and their families. You liaise effectively with various agencies, including social care and other services, where needed.

Parents, staff and pupils described systems in place to ensure that pupils are kept safe. These include the use of registers to ensure that pupils using taxis or the school bus get on them safely at the end of the day. The school's security measures are effective and ensure that only authorised persons can gain access to the school during the day.

You, your staff and governors make it clear that keeping children safe is a key priority. Staff and governors have received appropriate training and know how to report concerns. Pupils and their parents say that they feel very safe at school. Pupils told me that they feel confident that all pupils from different backgrounds, cultures or beliefs would be accepted by their peers. Pupils and parents say that bullying does not happen at this school but should it occur, they are confident staff would deal with it quickly.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I initially looked at how effectively leaders have improved provision in the early years. Since the previous inspection, you have taken responsibility for leading and improving the early years provision. You and your team have a clear understanding of how to support the children's learning. You plan a wide range of interesting and exciting activities that ensure children engage in purposeful play that develops their progress in the areas of learning. Previous low attainment in Reception was due to children not attaining as well in reading, writing and mathematics as they did in other learning areas. As the early years leader, you have a clear view of what the children need to learn to achieve a good level of development and you have put planning in place to ensure that they make good gains in their learning. Assessment is used well to decide what the children need to learn next. Adults are deployed effectively and are confident

in supporting and challenging children to extend their learning. During the inspection, I observed the children's enjoyment as they participated in enticing outdoor activities. We agreed that the school's current assessment suggests that the outcomes for children in Reception this year are stronger than they were last year.

- My second focus during the inspection was the effectiveness of leaders' actions to improve the outcomes in writing, particularly for key stage 1 pupils. You have identified that weaknesses in pupils' spelling and grammar affected how well they achieved in last year's writing assessment. As a result, you have introduced a structured teaching programme across the school. I saw the positive impact of this in key stage 1. Staff have devised a new system to track pupils' progress in writing. This is being used to help teachers adapt work so as to guide pupils more effectively towards meeting the higher age-related expectations. To help pupils meet these higher levels of expectation, you have put additional support in place for pupils, including the pupils who did not meet expectations last year. We agreed that pupils' current work across the school suggests that they make good progress. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making good progress because of the support they receive and the effective spending of additional funding.
- I was impressed that pupils of different ages throughout the school could explain to me what features their teachers would expect them to include in their writing to make it as good as possible, for instance when choosing vocabulary to make traditional tales interesting. An increasing amount of pupils' writing is displayed across the school. Pupils' books indicate that they are given opportunities to write in different subjects. In key stage 2, pupils' spelling, grammar and presentation is not of a consistently high standard.
- I considered the school's website. Although the website is easy to access and includes some useful information for parents, there were a number of areas that were not complete. After discussion with you, you were able to ensure that these areas were addressed by the end of the inspection.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the percentage of pupils at the end of key stage 1 meeting the expected standard in writing is at least in line with the national average
- pupils' writing in key stage 2 develops, especially in relation to spelling, punctuation and presentation
- the proportion of children in the early years attaining a good level of development is at least in line with the national average, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.

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

Claire Cropper
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held a number of discussions with you. I also met formally with six pupils. I met parents as they dropped their children off at school. In addition, I held meetings with three governors. I had a telephone discussion with the local authority officer. We visited lessons together to observe pupils' learning and to look at pupils' work in their books. I observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and their behaviour around the school. I looked at a range of pupils' written work across the school with you, along with assessment records. Furthermore, I took into account 10 responses to Parent View and the school's own surveys. In addition, I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's own self-evaluation, the school development plan, the school's own information about pupils' progress, safeguarding records and policies, and the school's behaviour and bullying records. I also undertook a review of the school's website.