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Mr David Shaw
Spire Junior School
Jawbones Hill
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Dear Mr Shaw

Short inspection of Spire Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 22 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 July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your arrival in September 2016 you have built very effectively on the work of your predecessor. The work that you have done on strengthening relationships with the wider community has, in particular, been very well received. The parents I spoke to during the inspection were full of praise for the way in which the school deals with any concerns they may have, for the quality of teaching that their children are receiving and the care and kindness of all members of staff. Parents who completed the online questionnaire, Parent View, used such adjectives as 'amazing' and 'brilliant' to describe the school. They also appreciate the opportunities that you and your colleagues have given them to be more involved in the education of their children through, for example, the half-termly parents' mornings and the Friends of Spire Junior group. The school's website and the use of social media really help parents and carers to stay abreast of developments at the school. Members of staff are extremely supportive of each other and are very committed to doing the very best they can for the pupils at the school. The pupils know this and, as a result, work hard in lessons.

Over recent months you have revised the curriculum and are now giving pupils far more opportunities to learn outside the classroom. The recent sleepover at a local museum and the work pupils did on the second world war in which pupils and parents had to re-enact the experience of evacuees both enriched the pupils' learning and served as an excellent stimulus for writing in the classroom. Pupils really enjoy school and know that they are making good progress.

The previous inspection recommended that you share best practice to ensure that teaching is consistently good or better across the school. You have been successful in creating a culture in which teachers are now learning from each other. The training on inference that your subject leader for English provided for the staff is having a positive impact on pupils' reading and teachers know that if they go on a course they will be expected to share what they have learned with their colleagues. Teachers and teaching assistants have a clear understanding of the key features of good lessons. Lessons have a clear sense of purpose and direction, learning activities allow all pupils, irrespective of their ability, to make progress and pupils are given opportunities to reflect on their learning and to learn from their mistakes. Pupils show pride in their work, take care over their handwriting and seek to produce work which is both neat and accurate. Displays of pupils' work are used both to celebrate and to support learning.

In the previous inspection report an additional area for development was that of spelling. Spelling is now taught much more systematically, mistakes are highlighted and pupils are tested at the end of each week to gauge the extent to which their spelling is improving. While you rightly believe that spelling remains a priority, the results achieved by last year's Year 6 pupils, which were in line with the national average in the end of key stage 2 examinations, indicate that good progress has been made in this area.

Since your arrival at the school you have been successful in ensuring that performance management arrangements are more robust with the result that teaching staff are now well supported and held to account. The processes by which you monitor and evaluate all aspects of the school have also been strengthened but, as you recognise, there is more work to do in this area. The analysis of historical and current performance information is not as precise as it should be with the result that school improvement priorities are insufficiently focused. Relative to schools nationally, absence overall and persistent absence are high.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records that you keep are detailed and of a high quality. The necessary vetting checks take place when new staff come to work at the school. Staff receive regular safeguarding training and updates when these are required. The school makes use of organisations such as the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children to give weight to the training that staff receive and to ensure that all aspects of safeguarding remain high on the school's agenda. The school also benefits from the work of a learning mentor and a behaviour mentor whose work with external agencies and families contribute strongly to the school's work in ensuring that pupils are kept safe. School visits are risk assessed and all members of staff are first-aid trained. Members of staff fully understand the need to raise any concerns they may have about the welfare of a pupil, if they arise.

Pupils say they feel safe at school and are aware of the dangers posed by the

internet. Bullying is rare and if ever a pupil feels that they are being bullied they know that they can share their concerns with a trusted adult. The curriculum and displays around the school help to ensure that children understand the importance of keeping themselves safe.

Inspection findings

- Typically, pupils achieve standards in reading, writing and mathematics that are in line with the national average, and sometimes above. The standards that they achieve in science and in English grammar, punctuation and spelling are also similar to the national average. Over time, the difference between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in school and that of non-disadvantaged pupils nationally is reducing, indicating that the school's pupil premium funding is having a positive impact. Pupils of all abilities make good progress during their time at Spire Junior. Historically, the percentage of pupils achieving the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics has been high relative to the national average. In 2016 there was, however, a decline in standards as a result of the increased challenge presented by the new primary curriculum. Information that you shared with me during the inspection indicated that while results in reading at the higher standard are likely to remain similar this year, pupils' attainment based on the higher standard will be better in writing and mathematics.
- We both agreed that historically the progress made by boys and also pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has been less than might have been expected. While this will remain something on which you will wish to continue to focus, results in 2016 show that boys and girls made similar progress in writing and that there had also been an improvement in the progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Current school information indicates that this positive trend is set to continue.
- Historically, the rates of overall and persistent absence for pupils at your school have been above the national average. The absence of pupils in receipt of free school meals and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has been a particular concern. Over time, however, attendance has improved. You recognise that there is still work to be done. Punctuality and the importance of good attendance are high profile in the school and you have shown yourself ready and willing to engage robustly with parents who do not send their children to school regularly.
- Good behaviour is recognised and rewarded in various ways through, for example, your 'Gold Award' assemblies. Potentially challenging behaviour is averted and over time the number of behaviour-related incidents is declining. There has also been a decline in the number of fixed-term exclusions, something you very much see as an action of last resort. Pupils behave very well around the school and have very positive attitudes towards learning. The atmosphere throughout the school is warm and purposeful, giving every pupil the chance to make good progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the school's use of performance data is more meticulous, better informs school improvement planning and promotes a better understanding of key priorities
- senior and middle level leaders take a greater role in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school
- there is a further reduction in overall and persistent absence.

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

Yours sincerely

Phil Drabble
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, your deputy headteacher, your learning mentor and your behaviour mentor. I also met with your chair and vice-chair of the governing body, with three middle-level leaders and four other members of staff. I also met with a representative from the local authority and a group of children. I spoke to parents as they brought their children to school and I undertook a tour of the school to see the learning that was taking place in all classes. I also visited the breakfast club and attended an assembly.

I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan and documents relating to safeguarding. I took account of the nine responses to online the parent survey.