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Ms Jo Beaumont
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Beaumont

Short inspection of Thorpe Acre Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 10 October 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 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 that inspection, the leadership team has remained stable, with continuity in the roles of headteacher and the chair of the governing body. There has been a slight increase in the number of pupils on roll and rising levels of mobility in the school's population. The values of the school are clearly highlighted and well understood by all members of the school community. Relationships between pupils and teachers are highly positive and the school has developed strong relationships with parents.

Leaders have a clear-sighted understanding of the school's improvement priorities and the impact of actions taken. The school has developed an effective partnership with its partner key stage 1 primary school, and is now sharing information on pupils' progress and best practice in teaching and learning. Teaching staff have also benefited from close collaboration with the local teaching school alliance. The school has also significantly benefited from your very capable leadership of a cross-county project focused on the barriers to learning among boys.

Pupils benefit from a rich and well-designed creative curriculum planned collaboratively by their teachers. The impact of well-designed planning of topic work can be seen in rich displays and high levels of engagement. The school has established high expectations for the presentation of work. Pupils are full of praise for the range of learning opportunities on offer, both within and beyond the classroom.

The school has also achieved a range of quality marks and awards, including the School Games Award, International Schools Award and Healthy School status. Pupils have also achieved particular success in winning a Young Innovators Award developed by a high-profile local business.

The school has succeeded in creating a positive climate for learning in which pupils' behaviour contributes to the pace of learning. Over time, leaders have succeeded in improving levels of attendance and building strong relationships with families. As a result of high-quality pastoral care, incidents of exclusion are also falling.

Leaders have successfully tackled the areas of improvement identified in the previous inspection report by identifying and embedding opportunities for pupils to work independently. Improved monitoring of the quality of teaching has enabled leaders to develop a shared culture of responsibility across the staff. The dedicated weekly timeslot 'Frustration Friday' is designed to develop problem-solving skills and foster resilience in pupils.

High expectations for the consistent use of the school's agreed protocols for marking and feedback by all teachers have enabled the school to provide pupils with clarity around their next steps. Pupils value the work that teachers do to help them move forward and have a clear understanding of how well they are doing. Leaders demonstrate a strong understanding of the information about how well pupils progress and attain. The introduction of new tracking systems is supporting leaders in their efforts to identify and address barriers to learning. Governors now have a strong analytical grasp of the school's data and demonstrate the capacity to monitor standards and ask difficult questions. The most able pupils are not yet provided with sufficient opportunities to deepen their knowledge and understanding. Leaders recognise that a greater proportion of pupils should be working at greater depth and have implemented a number of strategies to extend pupils' thinking and sharpen their skills. Improving the progress of the most able disadvantaged pupils is a key priority for the school and leaders are now focused on planning effective use of the pupil premium to improve their outcomes.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have secured a highly effective culture of vigilance and shared responsibility for all aspects of safeguarding. Policies and procedures for ensuring the safety and welfare of pupils are detailed and carefully embedded. In cases where pupils require higher levels of support from external agencies, record-keeping is extremely helpful. The highly regarded family liaison officer has succeeded in building positive relationships across the school community and has introduced a number of initiatives designed to enhance parental engagement. The safeguarding governor also plays a key role in scrutinising the effectiveness of systems and holding leaders to account. Safer recruitment training for leaders and governors ensures that pupils are kept safe.

Staff receive regular training on a range of aspects of child protection, including raising of awareness of the risks of exposure to extremism and the possible signs of

neglect. The importance of protecting the principles of equality and diversity is emphasised through delivery of both the school's curriculum and pastoral programme. Pupils speak with pride about their involvement in anti-bullying initiatives and are keen to describe the importance of the 'worry' box in creating a confidential space in each classroom to share their concerns with staff. Through the introduction of the 'zip it, block it' initiative, pupils are also taught how to use digital technology safely.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have identified the barriers to pupils' achievement in reading and have introduced a range of initiatives designed to secure improvement. This work has involved a range of external organisations, including visits to the local library and a highly effective project, developed with the local football club, designed to improve boys' reading habits. Implementation of a new reading programme, alongside the reorganisation of the school library, has enabled teachers to raise the profile of reading and enhance the love of literature among pupils. Teachers plan pupil-led, text-based activities in order to generate energy and enthusiasm for reading. The introduction of phonics-based approaches to language development is also having a positive impact on pupils' progress.
- Outcomes in writing have improved. The proportion of pupils who reach the expected standard is now in line with the national average. Key to these improvements has been teachers' use of word walls to raise the profile of subject-specific language. In all areas of the curriculum, pupils are encouraged to draft and redraft their work, and are provided with clear guidance on how to improve their spelling, punctuation and grammar. The introduction of a 'golden book' for publishing pupils' best work has been warmly welcomed by pupils and parents and carers.
- In mathematics, leaders have identified problem-solving and reasoning as key areas for development. The whole-school focus on reading is enabling pupils to engage more confidently with the vocabulary demands of the key stage 2 mathematics national tests and, as a result, the attainment of pupils has improved. The implementation of a range of strategies, including structured, small-group work, one-to-one support and introductory teaching, is helping to raise standards and develop confidence in mathematics.
- In reading and mathematics, the proportion of pupils who achieve the expected standard is lower than the national average. Currently, some learning activities lack appropriate challenge. In response, leaders have developed strong quality assurance systems to ensure that teachers' planning is effective. The achievements of the most able pupils are celebrated in whole-school assemblies and through competitions. Access to a programme of outreach workshops, delivered by local secondary schools, also promotes aspiration.
- Leaders are clear in their ambition for improvement and the latest school data suggests that a greater proportion of pupils are starting to succeed at this level.
- Pupils who are disadvantaged have performed less well than other pupils in recent years in English and mathematics. Leaders have a clear-sighted

understanding of the issues and have appointed a dedicated teacher to specifically track these pupils' progress and plan relevant interventions. The use of the pupil premium funding is closely monitored by governors, and leaders have strengthened systems of monitoring and accountability to ensure that 'no child is left behind'. As a result of this work, the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils is starting to show improvement. However, increasing the proportion of these pupils who exceed the national standard remains a priority for leaders.

- Levels of pupils' absence at the school are generally in line with national averages, although vulnerable pupils are more likely to be persistently absent. The school works closely with appropriate agencies to ensure that positive messages about attendance are reiterated and, as a result, levels of absence for disadvantaged pupils are falling.
- Leaders have clear records of the interventions they have put in place to ensure that exclusion is used as a last resort. The use of fixed-term exclusions is reducing, although this remains a priority for the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils, and in particular those who are the most able, improve more rapidly
- higher proportions of pupils exceed the expected standard in reading and mathematics, through planned activities that provide sufficient levels of challenge for all.

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

Yours sincerely

Emma Hollis-Brown
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

When we met at the start of this inspection, I shared with you the main areas of focus. We discussed the changes to the school's context and the improvements made since the last inspection. We agreed to look closely at the progress of pupils in reading and mathematics, with particular focus on disadvantaged pupils. Prior to the inspection, I checked the school website to ensure that it meets current requirements for the publication of documentation.

During the inspection, we carried out a series of short observations of all classrooms. We also looked closely at pupils' progress over time in a range of their books. Together with the lead for mathematics, we also reviewed a sample of pupils' work and considered their attainment and progress.

I met with a group of pupils drawn from all years of the school represented on the school council, to discuss their experience of school life. I observed their behaviour and conduct around the school and in social time. I met with the chair of the governing body and two other governors. I also met with the subject lead for mathematics and the coordinator of the provision for disadvantaged pupils. I reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's development plan and self-evaluation document.

We discussed a range of aspects of the school's safeguarding work, scrutinised documentation and reviewed records of the checks made on the suitability of staff to work with children.

I considered 20 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and I also spoke with parents as they dropped their children off at the start of the school day.