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15 January 2018

Mr David Ashcroft
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Ashcroft

Short inspection of Thornton Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 December 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 2014.

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 staff team have created a caring and inclusive school community which is valued by pupils and parents. The school's core values, 'Respect, Love and Ambition', underpin all that the school does and demonstrate your commitment to ensuring that all pupils succeed. Those parents spoken to during this inspection, and those who responded to Parent View and the school's own surveys, are highly supportive of the school. Many told me how happy they are with the school and how they value the good relationships that exist between staff and parents.

At the previous inspection, you were asked to improve the overall quality of teaching and ensure that pupils make better progress in mathematics. As a result of your work, pupils typically experience high-quality teaching. Teachers' good subject knowledge enables them to make learning an enjoyable experience for pupils. There are now strengths in the teaching of mathematics. However, you recognise that further work is required in this subject so that pupils make even better progress, and more achieve greater depth at the end of key stage 2.

A particular challenge for you is the high number of pupils who start at or leave the school other than at the normal times. These pupils benefit from the strong support and guidance and excellent nurture that the school provides. You also ensure that regular assessments are made of each pupil's progress to establish whether or not additional support is required. Records show that these pupils make progress at a

similar rate to their peers, with some making rapid progress as gaps in their learning are closed.

Since the previous inspection there have been a number of staff changes, including a new deputy headteacher who has played a significant role in making further improvements to pupils' behaviour and welfare. The staff team is fully supportive of you and other leaders, and morale is high. All of those who responded to the inspection survey said that the school is well led and managed and that they are proud to work there.

Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and the areas that need further improvement. They make regular visits to the school, to better understand their areas of responsibility and to ensure that key school improvement plans are monitored and reviewed. They also maintain a good overview of staff appraisal and ensure that the school's safeguarding arrangements are up to date and meet current requirements.

You will be leaving the school at the end of this term. The governors have appointed a new headteacher to lead the school from January 2018. The new headteacher has already visited the school to meet parents and staff. Good arrangements have been made to support him as he takes up his new role.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders ensure that safeguarding is given the highest priority at Thornton Primary School. Staff are well trained. They are fully aware of their responsibilities in keeping pupils safe and how to recognise signs that might suggest a pupil is at risk. The school works closely with outside agencies, where necessary, and always tries to intervene early to support families and prevent concerns from escalating.

The school keeps detailed records of the checks that are made on staff appointed to the school and ensures that policies and procedures are regularly reviewed to reflect current legislation. Governors play a role in this process by making regular checks on key policies and procedures.

Inspection findings

- Strong leadership has resulted in effective teaching, learning and assessment across the school. School leaders make regular checks on the impact of teaching on pupils' progress. Leaders manage the performance of teachers and teaching assistants well. Staff value the regular training opportunities they are given and say that this encourages them to constantly reflect on their practice and look to improve the quality of their teaching.
- The school improvement plan is closely linked to the school's self-evaluation document which provides a comprehensive and accurate summary of the school's strengths and areas for development. The plan is detailed and correctly identifies the actions that the school needs to take to build on the progress that has been made. For example, there are clear and appropriate plans to further improve

pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders also recognise that not enough of the most able pupils are reaching the higher standards at the end of key stage 2.

- Pupils are provided with good opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills in mathematics. The work seen in books showed that they work hard and have already studied a broad range of mathematical topics this year. However, pupils do sometimes struggle to use and apply what they know. For example, some high-ability Year 5 pupils who were successfully answering questions on area in their books couldn't apply this knowledge to give a sensible estimate for the area of the classroom.
- Children often join the school with low standards in literacy. They are taught well in the early years and learn early reading and writing skills effectively. Teachers and school leaders track progress closely and provide additional support, where necessary, to ensure that pupils continue to make progress. Results dipped in reading and writing in 2017. However, the school's own assessment information and the work seen in books show that current pupils are making good progress. Nonetheless, school leaders recognise that too few pupils are reaching the higher standards at the end of key stage 2. Leaders have identified this as an area for improvement.
- School leaders ensure that the school is a safe and nurturing place for pupils. There is a strong pastoral care system at the school. Each pupil has a staff mentor, to whom they can turn if they have any concerns or worries. Pupils told me that they know that staff will solve any problems that might arise. Pupils are also taught how to stay safe. Pupils spoken to during this inspection understood about the different forms of bullying and the risks associated with the internet and social media. Older pupils have recently completed a 'Bikeability' course, learning about how to stay safe while cycling on the road.
- You have worked successfully to improve attendance, which is now around the national average. You keep a very close eye on pupil absences. You regularly stress the importance of good attendance to parents and pupils. The school has worked successfully with a small number of disadvantaged pupils whose attendance was of concern. You have helped the parents of these pupils to understand the importance of attendance on the pupils' progress and attainment.
- Despite the small size of the school, pupils regularly study a wide range of subjects and benefit from many different learning experiences. The curriculum is planned well and opportunities are regularly taken to enhance the curriculum with art, music and educational visits. Older pupils particularly enjoy their residential trip, where they take part in a variety of outdoor pursuits. However, you recognise that further improvements could be made to subjects such as science and geography. You have plans in place to develop the role of subject leaders in monitoring and developing their subject areas.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- further improvements are made to the teaching of mathematics by providing pupils with more opportunities to use and apply their knowledge to solve problems
- more pupils reach the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2
- middle leaders play a more effective role in monitoring and improving their subject areas.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Tomkow
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, four governors, including the chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I took account of the 28 responses to Parent View. I also considered 11 staff responses to the inspection survey. The views expressed by parents in the school's own surveys were also considered. I visited all classes jointly with you and spoke to pupils, in class and at breaktimes. I looked at the work in pupils' books and information about pupils' progress and attainment. I reviewed the school's website and considered a range of documents, including child protection information, the school improvement plan, the school self-evaluation document and action plans for improvement. I also scrutinised documents relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.