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Mr Chris Hill
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hill

Short inspection of Higham Ferrers Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 11 January 2018, 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 November 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

There have been significant changes since the last inspection. You joined the school in September 2016. You have restructured the leadership team, which now includes the assistant headteacher and year group leaders. You and your team quickly evaluated the school's areas for development and have been swift in implementing the changes that were felt necessary.

Following the last inspection, leaders were asked to provide pupils with greater opportunities to write longer pieces of work. Since you have joined the school, you have made changes to the way writing is taught. Pupils are encouraged to practise and develop their skills, building towards writing an independent extended piece of work. Pupils' workbooks show that pupils are given opportunities to draft and improve their writing. Teachers develop pupils' skills systematically, and pupils are encouraged to include evidence of these skills in their writing. In 2017, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard was above the national average.

Leaders were also asked to ensure that pupils make consistent rates of progress in lessons, and for teachers to provide pupils with opportunities to reflect on and practise the skills they have learned. You have made significant changes to the curriculum since September 2016, including to the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics. You have focused on the quality of teaching and learning in all

lessons. There is a consistent approach to the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics across the school. However, some teachers are not as confident with this new approach. You have identified this, and are running a programme of professional development and lesson study to support teachers.

Pupils enjoying coming to school. They appreciate the many opportunities that are available to them. They strive to become part of the junior leadership team, members of which contribute to school improvement and to decisions that affect the whole school. Pupil ambassadors take an active role in celebrating good behaviour, and peer mentors support pupils who do not have someone to play with. Older pupils are encouraged to look after pupils new to the school. Pupils are keen to earn house points and hope to be part of the winning house at the end of the year. Pupils feel safe at the school. They feel that their teachers are 'nice and talented', and that there is always someone to talk to if they have a problem.

Parents and carers are positive about the work of the school. Since you have joined the school, you have ensured that you communicate changes to parents, and have actively sought the views of parents about the life of the school. Parents I spoke to said that any concerns they have are dealt with effectively, and that you and your team provide support for pupils when needed.

Staff are positive about the recent changes to the school. They feel well supported by the leadership team, and are confident that their actions are having a positive impact on the progress that pupils make. Middle leaders are keen to develop their roles, and feel that their actions are having an impact on the progress that pupils make.

Governors have been supportive of you and your leadership team. They understand why you have made the changes you have, and are ambitious for improvement. Governors have specific roles linked to school development priorities, and they are taking an active role in monitoring areas for improvement. You are providing governors with pertinent information to allow them to hold you to account. Governors are using this information well.

Safeguarding is effective.

Members of the leadership team have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You and your designated safeguarding team are knowledgeable about the safeguarding risks to your pupils. As a team, you work well together to track referrals that are made to you. You ensure that appropriate support is put in place when required. You have ensured that staff receive regular training on passing on concerns and the signs of abuse. Staff I spoke to knew the importance of safeguarding pupils and said that the safeguarding team would deal with concerns when passed on. Your records for safeguarding are secure and well maintained.

Inspection findings

- You have recognised that your pupils do not make as much progress in reading

as other pupils nationally. You have restructured the teaching of reading across the school, and have a consistent approach in place. Pupils are encouraged to talk about books to develop their skills of comprehension, inference and deduction. You are using assessment information to track pupils' reading progress carefully. This information shows that pupils are making good progress this year. Some teachers are not fully confident in delivering the new approach to reading you have introduced. Their expectations of what pupils can achieve in the time is too low. Where this is the case, pupils' focus wanes and they become distracted. As a result, learning time is lost.

- You have made significant changes to the way mathematics is taught across the school. You have focused on deepening pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts, while applying their knowledge to problem-solving and reasoning. Teachers have high expectations of the calculation skills that pupils should understand. However, some teachers are less confident in developing pupils' reasoning skills. In some lessons, teachers do not provide pupils with enough opportunities to complete problem-solving activities.
- The leader with responsibility for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has ensured that these pupils are well supported. A range of information is used to monitor how much progress these pupils are making. Support is quickly put in place when needs arise and pupils take an active role in whole-class learning. These pupils make good progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of reading is further developed to ensure that all teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve
- teachers use assessment information in mathematics to set tasks that match pupils' abilities well.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and the assistant headteacher. I held a meeting with three governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke with five middle leaders and the school business manager. I met with six pupils, and I spoke to pupils in class. You, a mathematics leader, a reading leader and I observed learning

taking place during the morning. This included reading, writing and mathematics lessons.

I scrutinised a selection of pupils' workbooks. I examined a range of the school's documentation, including its self-evaluation document, its improvement plan and documents relating to safeguarding.

I considered the views of parents by speaking with some of them before school. I also analysed the 73 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. I considered the 24 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. I also reviewed the responses to your own parent and pupil surveys.