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Mrs Tina Thornton
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Thornton

Short inspection of Scholes (Holmfirth) J & I School

Following my visit to the school on 6 February 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 2013.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Following the last inspection, leaders were asked to increase the amount of consistently good and outstanding teaching so that pupils make rapid and sustained progress in writing. Although there was some initial improvement, more recently there has been a decline in standards. Over the last two years, proportions of pupils reaching and exceeding expectations for their age in writing at both key stages 1 and 2 have been below national averages. Very few pupils have reached higher standards when compared to national figures. Progress rates in writing at the end of key stage 2 were well below average in both 2016 and 2017. From your latest assessment information and our scrutiny of work in pupils' books, writing remains an area of concern for the school.

Outcomes in other aspects have been somewhat inconsistent across the school. Fewer children than usual reached a good level of development at the end of the early years in 2017 and the proportion of pupils meeting the phonics screening check at Year 1 has been below average for the last three years. Much lower proportions have been working at greater depth in reading and mathematics over the last two years at key stage 1 than nationally. Progress rates at key stage 2 in reading and mathematics in 2017 lagged behind the national average. However, at key stage 2, the proportion of pupils reaching expected standards in these subjects

was above average and broadly average for those reaching higher standards.

The information you shared with me indicates that you expect improved outcomes in 2018 across most year groups but you also explained that the new assessment systems are not yet fully embedded. You are still working to ensure consistency and accuracy in this respect and so are rightly cautious in your predictions.

The children in Reception enjoy their learning and are bursting to give their ideas to the teacher. They show care and respect for each other and happily follow established routines. They love to join in with shared reading aloud and like to access all the stimulating activities on offer. Parents speak warmly about the support offered by the school and the welcoming atmosphere that has helped children to settle in so well.

Pupils like being at school and generally conduct themselves well, showing good manners and a friendly attitude to visitors. You explained that a small minority of pupils have presented challenging behaviour and this has sometimes slowed down learning. A few parents also voiced concern about this. You have prioritised the introduction of a new behaviour policy and additional nurture support through The Den to help these pupils improve attitudes to learning. The impact of these actions appears to be having a very positive effect, although you know there is further work ahead.

There has been some turbulence in senior leadership, including two changes of headteacher since the previous inspection, so that the current senior leadership team has only recently been established. Changes in staffing have also slowed down the rate of school improvement but you now have a clear idea of the school's strengths and areas that require improvement. A supportive and well-informed governing body echoes your accurate view of the school. Governors know that writing is a major focus for improvement and recognise that senior and middle leaders are at an early stage of their development in raising standards across the curriculum. Some leaders have had only a term in their post so their impact on holding colleagues to account is, as yet, limited.

The vast majority of parents are very supportive and appreciate the care and support offered, especially for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. One parent said, 'As a parent I feel immensely supported and valued by this school.' Another said, 'The teacher knows what makes my child tick – and what areas she needs support with.'

Safeguarding is effective.

The strong culture of care and interest in the well-being of every pupil is a recurrent theme in this school. Pupils I spoke with said that they feel safe and like coming to school. They trust the adults to look after them well. Recruitment checks are most thorough and meet all requirements. Induction arrangements and frequent training updates for staff ensure that everyone knows what to do if they have concerns about a pupil. The new electronic recording system for safeguarding and behaviour

management is helping leaders to communicate issues and actions effectively.

You play an active part in supporting the well-being of young people within and beyond your school, as a member of the community hub. You engage productively with external agencies to broker additional help for families. Sometimes you have had to be tenacious in making sure that interventions have been timely and consistently managed. Your nurture leader also provides strong support and advice to families, and comments by parents show how much they value this. Governors and leaders meet several times over the year to ensure that child protection systems and practice are reviewed. This vigilance by leaders and governors helps ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Attendance has been consistently above the national average for some time and you are alive to any dip in attendance for individual pupils. You know all the pupils very well and are resolute in ensuring that the school provides a safe, happy and stimulating environment for its young people.

Inspection findings

- The quality of pupils' writing across the school is very variable and this is borne out by the assessment outcomes. When we looked at work in books you agreed that presentation lacks consistency and not all pupils take a pride in their work. For some pupils, including boys and a few most-able pupils, handwriting is a struggle because the formation and joining of letters is incorrect. This slows down the writing process and also contributes to spelling and capitalisation confusion. Grammar and punctuation are taught but opportunities to develop and apply skills through writing for a range of purposes in other subjects are limited. Across different cohorts, there is inconsistency in the degree to which pupils edit and improve their writing or correct common word spelling mistakes; this means that some basic errors are repeated over time. Insufficient use is made of high-quality texts as exemplars to help pupils develop their own writing. You yourself have identified these weaknesses and have already planned in additional training for staff to improve practice in this subject. You also intend to introduce a consistent approach to the way handwriting is taught so that good habits are formed early.
- Another area we looked at was the provision for the most able pupils. When I spoke to a group of these pupils, they told me that they prefer the work in mathematics to writing. They like the challenge that you are increasingly providing through reasoning and problem-solving activities. 'We want challenge. We like a challenge!' they said. They also said that the challenge could be even more testing because they feel that work is never too hard, but sometimes too easy. This is the case in other subjects such as science, history or religious education, where work in folders shows that activities do not consistently go deep enough. Pupils explained that, while homework included plentiful mathematics activities, there were fewer opportunities to explore other subjects.
- We also discussed the way that disadvantaged pupils are supported. Over time, outcomes for this group have been below those of other pupils. There are very small numbers of these pupils in each class but from discussion about

assessment information and observations of work, I can see that this group is uppermost in leaders' thoughts. Governors are also alert to these pupils as they move through school and frequently ask about their progress, which you track carefully. You support disadvantaged pupils well to help them participate in wider aspects of school life and the nurture work, recently introduced, is helping those pupils with emotional and behavioural issues to work and interact more positively. Pupil premium funding is spent appropriately.

- You and the governing body have successfully established the new leadership structure. You know the school and the pupils well, and staff value your support and collegiate approach. Several of the senior and subject leaders are very new to their roles and so are still learning their trade. You recognise that a next step is for them to take on more accountability for the quality of teaching and the standards pupils achieve. The school development plan provides a shared vision and focuses on the right priorities to address. However, it would benefit from sharper, more measurable milestones against which leaders can evaluate and report back on success.
- You have worked hard to improve learning attitudes so that pupils develop more positive traits in what they do. You see this as fundamental for future success in driving up standards. The 'Yes you can' initiative is strengthening pupils' capacity for concentration, perseverance and independence. You are now determined to instil a greater sense of pride by raising expectations about the quality of work that pupils produce.
- For a relatively small school, there is a good range of enrichment on offer, both within the curriculum and as part of the extra-curricular programme of events, clubs and residential visits. Pupils spoke animatedly about the exciting activities they encounter at two outdoor activity centres and the range of sports in which they can participate at lunchtimes and after school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- senior and subject leaders exert a greater influence on the quality of teaching to raise standards by:
 - further developing the skills of senior and subject leaders in checking on the standards of teaching and learning across the school against clear criteria
 - setting consistently high expectations about the way pupils set out their written work across all subjects and holding staff to account for the quality of presentation in books.
- standards in writing improve by:
 - providing frequent opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their grammar, punctuation and spelling skills across a range of purposes and subjects
 - implementing a cohesive approach to the teaching of handwriting, right from the early years.

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

Yours sincerely

James Reid
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I met with you and your senior and subject leaders. You and I jointly observed teaching and learning in seven classes. I also viewed the school's latest assessment information. You, an assistant headteacher and I scrutinised pupils' work in a range of subjects. I examined documentation including the school development plan and the school's own self-evaluation statement. I looked at information published on the school's website and also safeguarding records. I met with governors and spoke to a representative of the local authority. I considered the views of parents, staff and pupils by talking to them informally, by meeting a group of pupils and from online responses to surveys, including Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, to which there were 54 parental responses.