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Mrs Joanne French
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Dear Mrs French

Short inspection of Tower Road Academy

Following my visit to the school on 21 February 2018 with Lindsay Hall, Ofsted Inspector, 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 March 2014.

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 appointment as headteacher in January 2015, you have set a clear path to improve the school further. You have accurately evaluated the school's strengths and planned a detailed programme of school improvements. With a focus on high standards, pupils are at the heart of your decision making. You ensure that every pupil has the opportunity to do well academically and to flourish as an individual.

You have established a team of senior staff who share your vision for the school. They have specific areas of responsibility and feel empowered to lead. You have, more recently, strengthened your middle leadership by creating subject leader and key middle leader roles. In doing so, you have given all staff opportunities to develop their own teaching practice. Some of these leaders are still relatively new to their positions and, therefore, their impact on pupils' outcomes is only just beginning to show. Staff feel fully involved in the improvements that are taking place in the school. Almost all staff who responded to their survey say that the school is well led. They feel valued and supported and they are proud to work at the school.

The school's motto, 'Take pride, give respect', permeates all aspects of school life. You and the staff encourage a positive and inclusive culture, where all are welcome and learning is risk free. Relationships between adults and pupils are positive. Inspectors saw pupils showing each other considerable respect, both in class and during social times. 'Collective ownership' by pupils and close monitoring by leaders

mean that incidents of poor behaviour by pupils are infrequent. Pupils like the opportunities to take on leadership roles, for example being a 'smartie' or a road safety officer. They also enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular activities available to them. The majority of pupils feel valued and have a mature and purposeful approach to their learning. They are keen to share their experiences with others, working with enthusiasm and often contributing their ideas in lessons. In such an environment, teachers ensure that lessons have a clear purpose and pupils' learning moves on.

Parents and carers who spoke with inspectors and who responded to the Ofsted survey are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. In the words of one parent, teachers at the school fill the pupils with 'a love of learning and a curiosity about the world around them'. Parents praise the pastoral care that their children receive. A number of parents comment that, despite the school being quite large, it still retains a community feel and every child is well known. You and the senior leaders work hard to engage parents in their children's learning. Your 'Family Learning' initiative has been very successful in building links between home and school. Parents value the opportunity to learn in school alongside their children. Their children's own attendance and outcomes improve as a result. However, while pupils' attendance is improving, leaders recognise that some pupils do not attend school regularly enough.

Governors are committed and ambitious for the school. Following a recent review of governance, the school's governing body has become much more focused on holding you and the other senior leaders to account. Governors have a clear understanding of the need to keep improving pupils' outcomes and attendance. With growing experience and training, governors are beginning to effectively support and challenge leaders to achieve the school's improvement plans.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors asked leaders to make improvements to the quality of teaching, with a specific focus on writing. Key stage 1 pupils' outcomes for writing have improved over the last two years and exceeded national averages at the expected and the higher standards in 2017. During our visits to lessons, we could see that pupils in Years 1 and 2 are enthusiastic about writing. Teachers use skilled questioning to encourage pupils to share their ideas and use more adventurous vocabulary. Pupils' workbooks reveal opportunities for them to improve the quality and the quantity of their written work and practise using accurate grammar and spellings. For example, pupils wrote an extended piece about their visit to Lincoln Castle. Current information on pupils' writing shows that Year 1 pupils, in particular, are progressing well compared to their different starting points.

Inspectors also asked leaders to ensure that teachers set written work for most-able pupils at the right level of difficulty. A new assessment system means that teachers match learning more closely to most-able pupils' needs. Teachers use sound subject knowledge to challenge these pupils since, as one Year 6 pupil told an inspector, 'when you are challenged, you learn new things'. Most-able pupils take responsibility for their own learning more often. For example, Year 6 pupils use the

'brain, buddy, boss' system to help improve the accuracy and complexity of their written work. On occasion, teachers could intervene and move pupils' learning on to the next steps quicker. In 2017, an increased proportion of Year 2 and Year 6 pupils gained the higher standards in writing compared with 2016. Most-able Year 6 pupils made more progress in their writing. Current pupil information and work in pupils' books indicate that this improving trend is set to continue in Year 6. However, leaders recognise that these improvements are not consistent across all year groups, particularly Years 2 and 5.

Pupils understand the importance of taking pride in their work. Teachers have high expectations of the quality of work pupils can produce and, in the main, pupils are meeting these standards. Leaders have introduced cursive writing and this is making a difference to pupils' handwriting, particularly in Years 1 and 2. Inspectors saw examples of good presentation and handwriting in pupils' books from all years, though occasionally least-able pupils do not present their work as well as other pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a culture of safeguarding at your school. Leaders carry out the necessary checks on adults before they are able to begin working at the school. Staff and governors receive training, including in relation to radicalisation and extremism, and suitable training is provided for adults in the early years. Leaders ensure that safeguarding records for pupils are detailed. If pupils need it, leaders seek more support from external organisations. School leaders and governors take their responsibilities for safeguarding seriously and arrangements are fit for purpose.

All of the pupils who spoke with inspectors said they feel safe in school. Staff and parents who responded to their respective surveys support this view. Pupils are confident that bullying rarely happens at school and, when it does, teachers are quick to resolve it. Pupils know how to stay safe, including when online and the potential risks online. Pupils could explain confidently about the importance of blocking and reporting any unknown contacts. They also know that there are people who they can talk to if they have any concerns, including ChildLine.

Inspection findings

- In the early years, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development has declined and was below the national average in 2017. Children's achievement was particularly low in writing. Teachers now emphasise children's written and communication skills through a range of tasks. Daily writing challenges, linked to their phonics activities, improve children's mark-making, pencil grip and letter formation. A higher proportion of children are already achieving a good level of development compared to 2017. From increasingly low starting points, children are making good progress.
- Children achieve well in phonics, with outcomes being above the national average for the last three years. Teachers skilfully meet the needs of children, for example by segmenting and blending more challenging words. With plenty of

opportunities to develop their phonics knowledge, children make rapid progress.

- In 2017, boys in key stages 1 and 2 did not achieve as highly as girls in reading or writing at the expected or the higher standards. Leaders have invested in new reading resources, with a strong emphasis on books that will encourage boys to read. Boys are enjoying reading 'real' books and those who read to an inspector did so with fluency and confidence. As a result of these initiatives, boys in Years 5 and 6 are making good progress in their reading. However, boys' attainment and progress in reading are not consistent across all year groups.
- Boys are using improvements in their reading to support their writing skills. In some lessons we observed, boys' comprehension of texts was strong and they were keen to share 'wow' techniques they had identified that added complexity to their writing, for example modal verbs. In other lessons, boys made confident use of colloquialisms in their informal letter writing. In their books, many boys write pieces of the same length and level of complexity as girls with similar prior attainment. However, written work by least-able boys is of a lower quality than girls. Fewer boys are achieving the higher standards in their writing than girls in all years, except for Year 6.
- Leaders have implemented a range of strategies to reduce regular absence from school. These actions are beginning to have an impact. Parents receive support in ensuring that their children attend well. Leaders make timely contact with parents if a pupil is absent and carry out home visits if necessary. The proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school is reducing but is still too high. In particular, disadvantaged pupils are absent from school too often.
- The achievement of disadvantaged pupils is not consistent across different subjects and classes. These pupils do not attend as well as other pupils. Leaders have not been precise enough with the allocation of pupil premium funding. Some strategies are inappropriate. Leaders' evaluations of the strategies lack precision and specific reference to their impact on disadvantaged pupils' outcomes. Improving provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils is a key priority on your school improvement plan.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers' expectations of boys are consistently high so that more of them are challenged to achieve the higher standard in reading and in writing at key stage 1 and key stage 2
- recently introduced strategies to monitor and improve absence become established so that the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school is reduced, particularly disadvantaged pupils
- extra funding received for disadvantaged pupils is allocated and monitored stringently in order to evaluate its impact on these pupils' progress precisely.

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

Yours sincerely

Rachel Tordoff
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you and senior leaders. We held meetings with middle leaders responsible for literacy, numeracy and the early years. We also met with leaders of behaviour and attendance and the coordinator for the provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. The lead inspector met with three members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.

We visited 14 classes, including the early years classes, to observe pupils' learning. Of these classes, 11 were jointly observed with senior leaders. We observed pupils' behaviour around the school and during lessons and we spoke with a group of Year 6 pupils, as well as speaking with other pupils informally. Inspectors scrutinised a selection of pupils' workbooks with you and senior leaders.

We met a number of parents informally at the beginning of the school day and we took into account the 139 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including the 39 free-text comments. We also considered the 44 responses to the staff survey.

We evaluated a range of information, including the school's self-evaluation, the school's improvement plan, documents relating to safeguarding, minutes of meetings of the governing body, the school's use of pupil premium funding and information relating to pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour, as well as a selection of school policies.