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Shelley Sharpe
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Dear Mrs Sharpe

Short inspection of Thomas Russell Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 20 March 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 June 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You provide inspirational and highly effective leadership and are unswerving in your drive to ensure that all pupils succeed in all areas of school life. Teachers and other staff share your commitment to providing pupils with exciting and relevant learning opportunities. Staff recognise and are appreciative of the impact of your leadership on all members of the school community. This was reflected in a member of staff's comment that 'The headteacher is incredibly supportive and puts our children at the heart of her decision-making.'

Outcomes for pupils have risen significantly since the previous inspection. Teachers and teaching assistants have high expectations of all pupils and use their strong subject knowledge to set tasks that are very well matched to pupils' needs and abilities. Attainment for pupils in Year 6 in reading, writing, mathematics and science is now well above the national average. As a result, pupils are extremely well prepared for their move to secondary school. They leave Thomas Russell Junior School with a very strong set of skills and knowledge, and highly positive attitudes towards learning.

You have successfully addressed all areas for improvement from the previous inspection. Middle leaders are now an intrinsic and effective element in school development and lead their areas of responsibility effectively. Parents and carers are now highly supportive of the school. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, would recommend the school and felt that their views were valued and acted upon. The comment that 'This is a fantastic school that really cares about the well-being of each and every child, and the whole child, not just academic progress,' was typical of the views of most parents.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. Pupils are consistently well behaved, courteous and show consideration for each other and adults in school. Relationships between adults and pupils are highly positive and are based on mutual respect. Classrooms are calm, well-managed places but there is a constant buzz of activity as pupils engage enthusiastically in their learning. In lessons, pupils work hard and diligently complete tasks, taking considerable pride in their work.

Pupils are rightly proud of their school and value the many opportunities that it offers them. They are appreciative of the wide range of enrichment activities that the school affords them, including music lessons, after-school clubs and residential visits. During the inspection, pupils from Year 5 spoke animatedly and excitedly about the challenging activities that they had taken part in during their recent trip to the Chasewater Outdoor Education Centre.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils' welfare and well-being are at the heart of the school's work. There is a strong culture of safeguarding that is based on the mantra that 'It could happen here.' As a result, all staff are aware of the need to be alert to any signs that pupils may be at risk of harm.

Leaders ensure that all staff are provided with regular training on how to keep the pupils safe, and understand and follow the agreed systems for reporting any concerns. Systems for carrying out all necessary employment checks on staff employed by the school are thorough and records are maintained meticulously.

Pupils have a very good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Leaders have made sure that pupils are taught about their own and others' safety as part of personal, social and health education, including water safety and safe use of the internet.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have developed comprehensive, well-planned and effective monitoring and evaluation systems. All members of staff are involved in monitoring activities and contribute to the overall evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This has helped greatly in ensuring that leaders have an accurate

view of the school's strengths and also any areas where there can be further improvements. Leaders systematically and thoroughly review all areas of the school's work.

- Subject leaders show passion and deep interest in their areas of responsibility. Senior leaders carefully match individual members of staff to specific leadership roles based upon their expertise and potential to drive improvement. Subject leaders use the outcomes of their evaluations to produce sharply focused development plans that contain well-defined actions and success criteria. These help leaders measure the impact of actions on pupils' learning.
- Governors are highly ambitious for the school and are actively involved in a range of monitoring activities, including learning walks, regular meetings with subject leaders, and analysis of school assessment information. They use evidence from these activities effectively to challenge and support school leaders.
- Pupils benefit from an extremely well-planned, broad and balanced curriculum. There is a strong commitment from leaders to ensuring that pupils succeed in all areas of school life and have opportunities to undertake exciting learning in all subjects. There is a strong focus on enabling pupils to undertake investigative and practical activities in subjects such as history, science and music. For example, during the inspection, Year 6 pupils worked with great enthusiasm on composing and performing short pieces of music using tablet computers. This demonstrated their impressive skills and knowledge of musical notation and use of information and communication technology.
- Leaders ensure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is at the heart of the school's work. Assemblies are used to encourage pupils to reflect upon current social issues and to develop their understanding of other people's beliefs and cultures. Over half of the pupils in the school are members of the choir and take great delight in performing for others, including as part of the Young Voices ensemble and at Symphony Hall in Birmingham.
- Leaders have used the additional primary sports funding extremely well to widen opportunities for all pupils to be involved, and succeed, in a range of physical activities. The emphasis that leaders place on ensuring that there is equality of opportunity for all pupils is reflected in the introduction of specific sports, including archery and seated volleyball. These are intended to appeal to pupils who have previously been reluctant to take part in extra-curricular games.
- While pupils are positive about the many opportunities that the school affords them, they show slightly less enthusiasm for learning in geography than in other subjects. Leaders recognise that there is further development work that should take place to ensure that all pupils have the same positive feelings for geographical studies as they do for the rest of the curriculum.
- As a result of consistently good teaching across the school, pupils reach standards of attainment that are well above the national average in writing and mathematics by the time they leave in Year 6. While pupils' attainment in reading compares very positively to other pupils nationally, their progress has, in the past two years, been slightly lower than in mathematics and writing.
- Leaders identified how the teaching of reading could be further developed. They

have taken decisive and effective action to widen opportunities for pupils to undertake reading activities that deepen their skills of inference and deduction. All pupils have been enrolled as members at the local library to encourage them to read for pleasure. Teachers provide extremely well-planned opportunities to undertake comprehension activities based on texts that engage pupils' interest and provide them with suitably challenging tasks. Leaders have extended the reading scheme to provide a greater range of books that are better matched to the needs of pupils who require additional support in reading. As a result, pupils currently in school are now making stronger progress in reading. However, leaders are not complacent and are using monitoring and evaluation well to identify further ways of improving this aspect of the school's work.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the recent changes and improvements to the teaching of reading are fully embedded to ensure that pupils consistently make the same excellent progress that they do in mathematics and writing
- the teaching of geography is further developed to promote the same high levels of pupils' engagement, enjoyment and achievement as in other subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Adam Hewett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and two middle leaders. I met with six governors, including the chair of the governing body. I considered the 71 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and reviewed the 36 free-text comments from parents and a written response from a parent. Together with you and the deputy headteacher, I visited eight lessons to observe learning. I met with a group of pupils and heard pupils read. I spoke with pupils in lessons and at lunchtime and observed their behaviour at lunchtime on the playground.

I scrutinised information about pupils' progress during the last academic year. I considered other documentation, including the school's evaluation of its own performance and the school improvement plan. I scrutinised the school's safeguarding procedures, including policies and checks on staff employed in the

school, and checked the school's website. I also analysed the range of views expressed by the 22 staff who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire about the school.