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11 June 2018

Mrs Lorna Karetnyk
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Dear Mrs Karetnyk

Short inspection of Thornton Dale CofE (VC) Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 24 May 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.

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.**

Thornton Dale is a school where pupils feel safe and where both parents and pupils acknowledge the care, taken by adults in school, to ensure pupils are safe and happy. Pupils and parents report that behaviour is good and that bullying is rare. In addition, pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe when using the internet and this means they know how to avoid potential dangers when they are online. Pupils also have lots of opportunities to play sports, whether this be through physical education (PE) lessons, or during the many and varied after-school sporting activities. They also appreciate the range of equipment they can use during playtime and lunchtime. They use apparatus safely and sensibly, taking turns and sharing well. During PE and in other lessons, pupils learn how to keep themselves fit and healthy, the requirements of a healthy diet and the importance of being active. This is further supported by the school dinners which are healthy and tasty, according to pupils.

Attendance is high and the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is low. I was interested to look at this area, as attendance declined dramatically in 2016. However, your effective work with pupils and parents helped to make significant improvements in pupils' attendance in 2017, and which continues to improve now.

Teaching in key stage 1 and the early years has a positive impact on pupils' learning and they make good progress. The children arrive into school with levels of development which are typical for their age. Since the last inspection, the children's attainment and progress has fluctuated at the end of Reception. However, the improved teaching and leadership of this area means that outcomes have improved in recent years and children enter Year 1 well prepared for learning. In Years 1 and 2, teachers continue to support pupils well so that a high proportion reach and exceed the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics.

Very recently, you have appointed a new deputy headteacher and a special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), both of whom join you as senior leaders. This has meant there have been changes made in the school, some of which are having a positive impact on pupils' outcomes. The SENCo has developed the provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. This had led to more rigour around the checks made on these pupils' specific needs and the training for teachers and other adults. Training now provides adults with key skills and strategies to help these pupils, in terms of their academic achievement and around their ability to manage their feelings and behaviour. As a result, these pupils are well served in school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors ensure that pupils are safe. Staff are trained regularly to ensure they understand the latest regulations around keeping children safe in education. It also means that they know who to speak to and what to do if they have a concern about a pupil's safety. Pupils and parents are also aware of what they should do if they have these concerns. Information for pupils, parents and staff is well advertised around school to help them if they have any concerns. Policies are in place and up to date. They are easily accessible to staff and parents. Policies are checked regularly by governors to ensure that they are fit for purpose and that statutory requirements are met. You have worked relentlessly with governors and detailed records of any issues concerning pupils' safety are kept securely by the school. Designated members of staff, and the governing body, check that all relevant information is verified and, where appropriate, external agencies are involved to support pupils. Such records help staff to have a full understanding of any issues where a pupil's safety has been a concern in the past. All staff's information is checked, including the information about their qualifications and suitability to work with children.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I was interested to understand what you and your leadership team have done to improve outcomes in key stage 2. Recently, some relevant training has taken place. However, your actions have not been swift enough and the delay means that the pupils in key stage 2, and particularly the current Year 6 cohort, have not fully benefited. While some improvements have been made, the attainment and progress of pupils in reading and mathematics are still not strong.

- Linked to this, you and your governors have not had an accurate enough understanding of the urgent action required to make improvements. You have an overly generous view of your impact on teaching and pupils' outcomes. This has delayed your response to the issues in school. This is despite the local authority communicating very clear messages to you about their concerns and where improvements are needed.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and pupils study a wide range of subjects. Through special events, such as trips, visitors and assemblies, pupils also develop a good understanding of British values. There is a focus on a specific value each half term and this helps to promote the strong conduct and positive relationships seen in school. It also means pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is well developed. However, in subjects such as science, history and geography, work is often too easy. As a result, pupils' progress is slow in these areas and reading, writing and mathematics skills are not well developed.
- The monitoring of teaching quality has served to identify where teaching is not strong enough. Where teaching has been weakest, you have acted so that these teachers understand what they need to do to improve. However, the training has not always been of a high enough quality, meaning it has not had a consistently good impact on pupils' progress. Equally, some monitoring has not fully identified issues around the lack of challenge, so this has not improved the progress of the most able pupils quickly enough.
- I also wanted to look into how useful your assessment systems are in supporting improvement in key stage 2. Assessment is accurate; however, it is not used well by some teachers in key stage 2. Consequently, these teachers plan lessons that do not always meet different groups of pupils' needs properly. This usually means work is too easy, has slowed pupils' progress and means too few reach the higher standards of attainment.
- Pupils' conduct in class and around school is good. However, at times the work seen in key stage 2 pupils' books shows they do not take enough pride in their learning. They do not always complete tasks and do not present their work neatly.
- Teaching at key stage 1 and in the early years is stronger than in key stage 2. Assessment information is accurate and well used by teachers to provide engaging and challenging work for pupils, who respond with positive attitudes to learning and a will to do their best. Their progress is strong as a result.
- Leadership of the early years and key stage 1 is also stronger. For example, you have improved systems in phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) so that outcomes have improved. This is also linked to the improvements seen in the early years setting, where children regularly practise their phonics skills in a range of activities, including their writing.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers in key stage 2 use assessment information more effectively to help them plan activities which accurately meet the needs of different groups of pupils
- the key stage 2 curriculum reinforces reading, writing and mathematics skills in a way that challenges pupils and supports rapid progress and high levels of attainment
- leaders' monitoring informs training opportunities which meet teachers' needs and support improved practices in key stage 2
- governance is strengthened so that governors have an accurate understanding of the school and use the information to challenge and support the school so that leaders work effectively to improve teaching and pupils' outcomes
- teachers promote high expectations of pupils' completion of work, and their presentation in books, in all areas of the curriculum, at key stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

Fiona McNally
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I visited a number of classes to observe teaching and its impact on learning. I also looked at a wide range of pupils' books from several year groups, across a variety of subjects. I met with you and your governors and with other senior and middle leaders. I also held a discussion with two representatives from the local authority. I looked at the school's information about the safeguarding of pupils and examined behaviour, attendance and bullying records. I also checked a range of other documentation, such as your self-evaluation, your school development plan and your assessment information. I held formal discussions with pupils from key stages 1 and 2, and spoke informally to pupils during breaktime. I also heard four pupils read from Year 2 and Year 5. I considered the parents' responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I spoke to a number of parents in the playground, as they dropped their children off at school.