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28 June 2018

Mr David Priestley  
Thorns Primary School  
Thorns Road  
Quarry Bank  
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West Midlands  
DY5 2JY

Dear Mr Priestley

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thorns Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 18 June 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school was judged to require improvement at its previous section 5 inspection in March 2017.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- maintain the momentum of improvement now established so that there is no decline in outcomes during the forthcoming senior leadership changes
- build on the improvements made in teaching and learning so that more pupils reach the standards appropriate for their age
- provide pupils with more opportunities to undertake extended pieces of independent writing across the curriculum
- monitor with increased rigour the progress of pupils who are disadvantaged,

pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils who speak English as an additional language.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The post-Ofsted action plan was evaluated. Other action plans for literacy and numeracy were discussed. A learning walk was undertaken jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. We observed teaching and spoke to pupils about what they were learning to do. I met with a group of six pupils and looked at their books with them. I also scrutinised a wider sample of pupils' books during the afternoon. I looked at minutes of governors' meetings and examples of external review documentation.

## **Context**

Since the last inspection, two new teachers have joined the school. The deputy headteacher is currently on maternity leave. Her role is being covered by a retired local authority school improvement adviser. The headteacher has announced his decision to retire at the end of the summer term 2018. Governors have recruited a new headteacher ready for September 2018. A new chair of governors, who is a national leader of governance, was appointed in November 2017.

## **Main findings**

Following a slow start, the momentum for change has gathered pace, and progress is now evident in the standards that pupils achieve. You have raised your expectations and made clear your vision for the school. The post-Ofsted action plan rightly focuses on improving teaching, learning and pupils' outcomes. It has been refined and now includes timescales, success criteria and measurable targets. Its impact is evaluated regularly. You have clarified roles and responsibilities and provided high-quality training for teachers. Staff across the school are held to account and understand the roles that they play in ensuring each child achieves their best.

You have introduced a new system to assess and track pupils' progress. This system has evolved over the last year and now allows you and other leaders to track pupils' achievements more closely. It is evident that more pupils are now reaching age-appropriate standards. You use assessment to quickly identify gaps in pupils' learning. This helps teachers plan work that is closely matched to pupils' needs. You provide opportunities for teachers to moderate and assess pupils' work with external consultants. As a result, teachers are more accurate when assessing pupils' work. They have confidence in the assessment information and adjust their teaching accordingly. You and other leaders do not just rely on the data to prove that

improvements are taking place. You regularly look at pupils' work in their books to check their progress. The books of current pupils show strong progress, especially in writing and mathematics, although work in the wider curriculum is more limited.

You are ably supported by subject leaders for English and mathematics. Their roles have developed as a result of commissioned external support. The leaders have a clear vision for the development of their subject. Together, they have ensured that all staff are clear about the basic skills pupils should master in each year group. They are rigorous in checking the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' progress. The leader for mathematics ensures that every opportunity is used to enable pupils to reason and apply their skills. Pupils talk enthusiastically about mathematics in assemblies and the messy maths sessions where they work together to solve problems.

Adults are now deployed effectively across the school. Teaching assistants are responsible for the interventions that they lead. They keep records on pupils' progress and report back to senior leaders. They are well trained and know how to support pupils appropriately. As a result of this targeted support, many pupils are now making accelerated progress.

Governance has been strengthened since the last inspection with the appointment of a new experienced and knowledgeable chair of governors. She is ensuring a strong and more rapid drive to improve the school. Governors commissioned their own external review of the use of the pupil premium funding following the last inspection. Regular meetings of the strategic committee are highly effective in ensuring that leaders are held to account, particularly for the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Governors do not accept at face value what they are told. They visit school to see for themselves. They observe pupil progress meetings and look at pupils' work. Governors ensure that they provide rigorous challenge and appropriate support. They are ambitious for the school.

You have made sure that fundamental British values are interwoven across the curriculum and that opportunities are provided for pupils to put them into practice. Pupils link democracy to their school council elections and the choices that they made for head boy and girl. Currently, a group of pupils are giving their opinion on the refurbishment of a local hospital ward for children. They are learning to respect differing views. Pupils who I spoke to during the inspection have a growing understanding of British values.

### **External support**

Members of the local authority have helped senior leaders develop their skills in driving rapid improvement. They have provided suitable challenge through their termly reviews of the school. They supported leaders in refining the action plans and in finding a new chair of the governing body. Leaders have made good use of

external support commissioned for specific actions such as supporting the development of middle leaders. This support is not as frequent as it was as leaders are now capable of driving further improvements themselves.

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

Yours sincerely

Nicola Harwood

**Her Majesty's Inspector**