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Mrs Teri Brown
Head of Academy
Fishtoft Academy
Gaysfield Road
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Dear Mrs Brown

Short inspection of Fishtoft Academy

Following my visit to the school on 3 July 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education since the previous inspection. You have successfully created a culture in which members of staff are mutually supportive and are committed to doing their best to enable pupils to succeed. The parents and carers with whom I spoke were very positive about the quality of education that their children are receiving. They value the fact that teachers are welcoming and are prepared to discuss any concerns that they may have. They felt that you and the staff know their children very well, and some also spoke positively about the one-to-one support that their children receive. Evidence from the school's recent survey of parents' views indicated that the vast majority of parents feel that their children are well taught, are making good progress and are happy at the school.

At the time of the last inspection, as an area for improvement, inspectors identified providing further opportunities for parents to become more actively involved in understanding their children's learning. You have successfully addressed this by providing parents with opportunities to support their children with, for example, spelling and handwriting. You also make good use of class newsletters, which set out what pupils are going to learn on a term-by-term basis.

In response to recommendations from the previous report, you have also successfully improved the quality of presentation in pupils' books. When we looked together at a sample of books, it was clear that teachers' expectations of how pupils

present their work are high and pupils take pride in their work. Pupils' handwriting is good and improves over time, reflecting the work you have done in this area. You have ensured that pupils' mathematical skills have improved. However, leaders have not, as yet, fully addressed the fact that the most able pupils are not effectively challenged.

As a small school, you understand how important it is to learn from the good practice in other schools. Through your membership of the Boston Witham Academies Federation and the Connect Teaching School Alliance, teachers have adopted practices which are enabling pupils to make better progress.

Pupils are proud to be members of Fishtoft Academy. The pupils with whom I spoke in the playground told me that they enjoy coming to school, get on well with other pupils and find lessons interesting. Through the partnership arrangements with other schools, including the local secondary school, pupils benefit from an increasingly broad range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils take part in visits to places such as Tattershall Castle and Gainsborough Old Hall, and play a range of sports, which are helping them to become well-rounded individuals, well equipped for the next stage of their education. In all of my interactions with pupils, I found them to be very friendly and engaging.

Governors undertake regular monitoring visits to the school, which help them to better understand how effectively the school is operating. They carefully track the progress that the school is making. Governors now make use of comparative data from other schools in order to better gauge the relative strengths and areas for improvement at Fishtoft.

Your analysis of the school's performance is accurate and the identified priorities within the school improvement plan clearly flow from that analysis. Over time, you have brought about a greater rigour and sense of urgency to further improving the school. While you are very supportive of the staff, and, in turn, well liked by them, you hold them to account.

Safeguarding is effective

The arrangements to safeguard pupils are fit for purpose. The school administrator is very diligent in ensuring that all the required vetting of staff and volunteers take place. Safeguarding policies are up to date and are readily available on the school website. All school visits are risk assessed. The school site is secure. Staff are expected to indicate that they have read key policies and have regular training in all matters relating to safeguarding. Pupils learn about the importance of staying safe in lessons, including how to stay safe on the road and in the digital world. The school ensures that pupils can swim 25 metres by the time that they leave school. Parents report that they have no concerns about their children's safety.

Inspection findings

- In 2017, there was a decline in Year 6 pupils' progress through key stage 2. Historically, however, their progress through key stage 2 has been at least similar to that made by pupils nationally, if not better.
- By the end of the early years, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development has been similar to the national average, with disadvantaged children doing particularly well.
- School leaders have been aware of the need to strengthen the teaching of reading and have taken a number of actions to address this. Teachers are using more challenging texts in lessons, and you have raised expectations of how much reading pupils should do at home. You have also introduced successful incentives to encourage pupils to read more widely. Given their age and ability, pupils I heard read did so with confidence and fluently.
- School leaders recognise that, when compared with schools nationally, the proportion of Year 6 pupils achieving higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics is lower than the national average. Lesson observations and the scrutiny of pupils' work that you and I undertook showed the actions that you are taking to address this are beginning to have a positive impact. In mathematics, the degree of challenge for all pupils has been raised. We saw this to good effect in Years 5 and 6 in the teaching of consecutive numbers. Pupils discussed in pairs the best method for calculating how many birthday candles they had blown out since they were born. In response to a recommendation in the previous inspection, you have also increased expectations that pupils should have swift recall of mathematical facts. We saw evidence of this in Years 2, 3 and 4, where pupils' knowledge of times tables helped them to multiply three-digit numbers by a one-digit number. The work we saw in English books showed that pupils have a secure understanding of the key features of good writing, and they make extensive use of editing and redrafting to improve the quality of their writing. The content of their work is interesting and generally grammatically accurate. Assessment data showed that, in most classes, most pupils are making the progress that the school expects them to make, and some are doing better than this. This was true of all groups of pupils. The data also pointed to an increase in the proportion of pupils achieving higher standards by the end of the year.
- An area of strength is the teaching of phonics. For the last three years, in the end of Year 1 national phonics screening check, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard for their age has been consistently above the national average. In 2017, all pupils who took the test achieved the expected standard. The school has ensured that any pupil who has not achieved the expected standard for their age by the end of Year 1 has done so by the end of Year 2. Children showed swift recall of letters and sounds and by identifying 'see it, say it' words and blending sounds were able to read some challenging sentences.
- School leaders fully recognise the link between good attendance and the progress children make in school. While this year there has been a slight increase

in overall absence, the overall trend is downwards. In 2017, both overall absence and persistent absence were below the national average. A display of current attendance figures and rewards serve to maintain the high profile of attendance at the school. The school has a 'zero tolerance' policy in respect of parents who take their children out of school to go on holiday.

- You have identified subject leadership as an area for improvement. In recent months, subject leaders for both mathematics and science have benefited from training to enable them to carry out their roles more effectively. The records of their lesson observations and reviews of pupils' work show that they understand more clearly the strengths and areas for development in the subjects for which they are responsible and that they are planning more effectively for improvement. This work has yet, however, to become fully embedded. Leaders are currently unable to form a fully accurate view of the quality of teaching and pupils' progress in subjects other than English, mathematics and science.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is an increase in the proportion of pupils who achieve the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2, so that it is closer to the national average
- there is a further strengthening of subject leadership across the school so that leaders form an accurate view of the progress pupils are making in all subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Phil Drabble
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, with the administrator and with members of the governing board. I met with three members of staff, including two subject leaders, and heard three children read. I made a tour of the school, observed teaching in three classes and undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work. I analysed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan and documents relating to safeguarding. I spoke with parents as they brought their children to school, and spoke with pupils over lunchtime. I also met with the chief executive officer and vice-chief executive officer of the Boston Witham Academies Federation.