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Dear Mr Owens

Short inspection of Montrose School

Following my visit to the school on 28 November 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 April 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Pupils continue to learn and achieve well. You lead a highly cohesive leadership team which, together with other staff, is able to bring about continued improvement in many aspects of the school's work. Relationships are very positive. Leaders and other staff have ensured that the school has an inclusive and supportive ethos in which pupils can learn and develop as individuals.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to consider how they could more widely support pupils' learning and development. Leaders have taken a range of effective actions. They work more closely with a secondary partner school, for example, to ensure that more effective transition arrangements are in place. They organise inter-school sports competitions and have established effective links with a special school and a local library. The school shares its ambitions to improve attendance with parents and carers. Many parents and pupils commented positively on the wide range of extra-curricular activities, clubs and trips the school offers. Children were observed in the early years, for example, returning from 'forest school', muddy and excited after building shelters, whittling, and making decorations from natural objects. Pupils spoke very positively about the sporting opportunities available to them. Teachers ensure that a wide range of enrichment activities support pupils' learning and personal development.

At the previous inspection, leaders were also asked to improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that tasks provide greater challenge, particularly for the most able pupils. This has been largely achieved. At the end of 2018, the proportions of pupils who achieved higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 improved compared to the previous year, and were above the national averages. In key stage 1, the proportion of pupils who achieved greater depth at the end of key stage 1 was similar to that seen nationally for mathematics and improved in reading and writing. However, too few disadvantaged pupils achieve greater depth or higher standards at the end of key stage 1 and 2.

Nonetheless, pupils' work shows that the majority of pupils are making good progress. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and are often skilled in questioning pupils to check understanding and develop pupils' thinking, for example, praising the use of the word 'because', to encourage pupils to expand on, and give reasons for their responses. Teachers plan lessons that usually provide a sufficient level of challenge for pupils of different abilities so that most pupils make good progress. A typical pupil comment was 'I like how they (teachers) challenge us. It makes me learn more. It makes me resilient to try, try again.' However, the challenge provided by teachers is not consistent in all classes and subjects. Sometimes teachers do not check that learning activities are as carefully matched to pupils' abilities as they could be. In some lessons, pupils are not challenged to produce the quality of which they are capable. Some pupils are capable of more.

Pupils behave and conduct themselves well at all times of the school day. Teachers ensure that pupils are polite, respectful, positive and confident. Pupils understand British values and the importance of treating each other with respect. Pupils know that it's important to 'Treat each other as you would want to be treated yourself.' Pupils listen well in lessons and apply themselves to all that is asked of them. Teachers praise pupils' work and efforts, and pupils have positive attitudes to their learning. Parents spoke of the friendly and approachable staff and the positive gains their children are making in their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a secure culture of safeguarding. Staff receive regular training in child protection, including in relation to the government's 'Prevent' duty. The school's record of recruitment checks is thorough. Leaders take timely action when they have any concerns about pupils' welfare and well-being. School systems for recording concerns are thorough.

Pupils spoke with confidence about how the school teaches them to keep themselves safe, for example when online or if they come across 'stranger danger'. Pupils explained to me with confidence, the school's fire safety arrangements. The very large majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, or spoke with me, said their children are safe. Pupils say bullying is rare. A very small minority of parents raised some issues; however, evidence shows that leaders record and follow up concerns when they are raised. Pupils told me

they can speak to their teacher, the family support worker, a Year 6 'anti-bullying prefect' or put a note in a worry box if they are concerned about anything. Most pupils are very confident that staff will try to resolve any concerns they may have.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed the key lines of enquiry I would investigate to test whether the school remains good. Across the school, standards are steadily improving. Teaching is effective. Pupils' current work shows that the majority of pupils are making good progress in reading, writing, mathematics and other subjects.
- I looked at whether leaders' use of the pupil premium improves outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Evidence gathered during the inspection shows that focused support is helping them to catch up. At the end of key stage 1 in 2018, disadvantaged pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics improved and was similar to that of pupils nationally. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieving the required standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check was above the national average. However, the progress of disadvantaged pupils at the end of key stage 2 was well below that of pupils nationally for reading and mathematics. Attainment, including at the higher levels, was also below the national averages for reading, writing and mathematics, though improved compared to the previous year. Very few disadvantaged pupils progressed to achieve the higher levels at the end of key stages 1 and 2.
- Leaders' evaluation of the school's performance is accurate and improvement plans focus on relevant actions to raise standards. The governing body is knowledgeable and has a clear overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The minutes of its meetings show that members of the governing body ask challenging questions of leaders in relation to different aspects of the school's work. However, the governing body is not as stringent as it could be in holding the school to account for the progress of different groups of pupils and for the use and impact of the pupil premium. Improvement plans, including for the use of the pupil premium, do not make clear enough the impact leaders and governors wish to see to help drive more rapid improvements to pupils' progress and attainment.
- Our observations of teaching and learning across the school showed that teachers are positive and enthusiastic and engage pupils' interest. Relationships are a strength. Teachers praise pupils for their good behaviour and efforts in their work. However, sometimes teachers do not use information about pupils' learning sharply enough to ensure that work is matched well to pupils' needs. Some pupils, including the most able, do not consistently make the progress they could.
- Leaders have introduced new initiatives to improve standards in reading. Progress in reading at the end of key stage 2 in 2018 was close to the national average as was attainment at the end of key stage 1.
- Our scrutiny of pupils' writing showed that pupils often complete work of a high standard and show perseverance in their work. Pupils write in a range of genres

in different subjects. There is evidence that pupils are sometimes taught to use their research skills effectively as a basis for their writing. Pupils' work shows they have stamina for writing. Overall, pupils make good progress. However, we also identified that there are some inconsistencies. Sometimes, teachers are not rigorous enough in expecting pupils to use accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation in their writing. This sometimes reduces the quality of pupils' work.

- Pupils' work shows that pupils also make good progress in mathematics, particularly in developing their understanding of calculation methods. Teachers are developing a 'mastery' approach and are often skilled in teaching pupils how to become fluent in their understanding of mathematical concepts by linking different aspects of mathematics and using visual imagery well. Pupils' calculation skills are strong. Teachers often provide pupils with appropriate and challenging activities, including opportunities for pupils to practise their problem-solving and reasoning skills. Teachers focus on giving pupils a deeper understanding of the structure of problems.
- Attendance was a line of enquiry explored during the inspection. Attendance for disadvantaged pupils has been too low over time. Leaders check attendance very closely and emphasise the importance of attendance to parents. Leaders, the family support worker, together with the education welfare officer, work with families whose children have high levels of persistent absence. As a result of leaders' actions, current figures show that attendance has improved during this academic year compared to the same period in 2017. Nonetheless, attendance, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, is still below average and is a continuing area of focus.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- their plans for improvement, including for the use of the pupil premium, are more sharply linked to improving pupils' progress and raising their attainment to help drive even more rapid improvement and enable the governing body to better hold leaders to account
- they are relentless in promoting high attendance, including the use of the pupil premium to help improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils
- teachers enhance their expertise in matching work accurately to pupils' abilities to further improve pupils' progress and raise their attainment.

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

Yours sincerely

John Lawson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher, the office business manager, members of the governing body including the chair, and I spoke with parents at the beginning of the day. I met with pupils informally during the school day, as well as a formal meeting with a group of pupils. Together, you, I and the deputy headteacher observed teaching and learning in nine lessons. During these visits, I looked at pupils' work and spoke with pupils to evaluate the quality of their learning. I also examined with you and the deputy headteacher, pupils' work in a sample of their books.

During the inspection, I scrutinised a variety of documents relating to safeguarding, behaviour, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, pupils' attainment and progress, staff performance and the school's self-evaluation document and plans for improvement. I assessed the impact on standards of leaders' actions taken since the last inspection, as well as additional lines of enquiry. I looked at the range and quality of information provided on the school's website. I considered the 58 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. There were no responses to the pupil and staff questionnaires.