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Dear Mrs Thomson

Short inspection of Dronfield Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 2019, 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 May 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. You lead a successful and happy school where standards and expectations are high, and where adults have pupils' interests and welfare at heart. You are supported and challenged by a knowledgeable governing body, led by an experienced chair, who is a national leader of governance. Like you, governors know exactly why the school is good and what needs to be done to improve it further.

The school's values are captured accurately in its motto of 'achieving potential while making learning fun'. Pupils' overall academic attainment is above the national average, and they leave well prepared for secondary school. They have positive attitudes to learning, paying close attention in lessons and working hard. Classrooms are rich learning environments, where pupils make strong progress due to effective teaching across different year groups. You ensure that staff receive training to improve their skills, as well as the opportunity to observe colleagues teach. Staff feel that you treat them with respect, are mindful of their workload and do not place undue pressure on them. They work in consistent ways because you provide them with detailed information as to how to perform their role.

The curriculum for all year groups is broad and balanced. It is enhanced by a wide range of extra-curricular activities and clubs that pupils enjoy greatly. These allow them to develop their skills in, for example, sport, music, cooking and art. Pupils were particularly keen to tell me about their enjoyment of the 'Chocolate Enterprise' project, and how they design and market creative products. Pupils informed me

how learning at Dronfield Juniors is fun, and this makes them want to come to school. Attendance is consistently above the national average. Pupils are respectful to others. They are polite and feel very proud to be part of their school community.

Unsurprisingly, the school is very popular with parents. Of those who responded to Parent View, 97% would recommend it to others. The words of one parent summed up the views of so many others by explaining: 'It is a fully inclusive school and staff go the extra mile. They listen well and, led by the headteacher, generate a highly positive, child-centred ethos. I wish all schools were like it!'

You have attended effectively to the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. You have introduced an effective system for giving pupils good advice about their work. Staff also are strongly in favour of this system because they can see that it is working while being manageable for them to implement. In addition, you ensure that teachers set work at the right level of difficulty for different ability groups. Pupils explained to me how teachers guide them well so that they choose work that is challenging and that needs to be completed carefully or persisted with.

Subject leaders for mathematics and English check closely on the quality of teaching in these subjects. They meet with year group colleagues to discuss this, and they have clear plans for improvement. They know that pupils do not attain as highly in writing, and they have helped to build pupils' enthusiasm to write. They judge, correctly, that pupils use good, ambitious words when writing. For example, pupils in Year 3 include words such as 'eerie' when describing a pirate galleon and 'ragged' when describing its sails. Pupils in Year 6 write sentences such as, 'The gloomy clouds invaded the once blue-as-the-ocean sky.' Leaders have identified, however, that when they compose longer and more complex sentences, pupils have not consistently checked that, for instance, they have used the correct tenses, or have spelled words they know correctly, or used accurate punctuation. In addition, teachers do not give pupils sufficient opportunities to write at length. These factors inhibit more pupils from attaining greater depth in writing by the time they leave the school.

Leaders for history and geography also have an understanding of the weaker aspects of teaching in their subject. They have concluded that, while teachers are effective at developing pupils' factual knowledge, pupils' skills in applying this knowledge to, for instance, interpret first-hand evidence such as a census, are not as strong. Teachers also do not currently have a system to assess pupils' skills. Leaders have not planned clearly how they will work with colleagues to improve teaching so that pupils make consistently strong progress in these subjects.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff are well trained in safeguarding. They are highly aware of their need to do all they can to protect pupils, and they are vigilant for the warning signs that may mean a pupil is being neglected, exploited or abused. They understand well the school's system for reporting their concerns and do not hesitate to use it if needed. You, in turn, keep good records and take prompt and appropriate action to minimise the risk of harm to a pupil. This includes referral to, and close work with, external agencies if required. You ensure that recruitment is managed safely and that there are appropriate procedures in place to manage visitors to the school.

Parents believe strongly that their children are safe in school, and pupils strongly agree. All of the many pupils in school whom I met told me how bullying and unkindness are extremely infrequent. Pupils know that they can talk to staff if they are concerned or worried about anything. Furthermore, they could explain to me how the curriculum teaches them about how to stay safe, including while using modern technology. Those I met showed a very clear understanding that they should immediately approach a trusted adult if they were ever sent a message or photograph that made them feel uncomfortable.

Inspection findings

- As well as dealing with pupils' misconceptions well, teachers ensure that the advice they give to pupils leads to prompt improvements in their work. Pupils explained to me that, along with some helpful written comments, they receive prompt and good verbal advice from teachers. Pupils told me that this helps them know what they have done well, and what they need to focus on learning next.
- Pupils are increasingly relaxed about making occasional errors in their work. They are understanding that these are necessary to learn well. A pupil was keen to tell me about the message in her classroom that told everyone that 'mistakes are the proof that you are trying'.
- Published data for 2018 shows that the proportion of pupils who attained the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 was consistently at least in line with, and in most cases above, the national average.
- This data also shows that the proportions that attained the higher standards in mathematics or reading were above the national average. However, the proportions for those attaining greater depth in writing were below the national average.
- Exercise books show that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make strong progress in writing from their starting points. For example, pupils in Year 3 who, at the start of the academic year were unsure how to put appropriate punctuation at the end of a sentence, had learned to consistently do this well a few weeks later. Workbooks show convincingly that, across year groups and for different ability groups, pupils write confidently and for a great range of purposes

and audiences over time.

- Pupils do not write as well as they could because teachers do not give them sufficient opportunities to write at length and to compose long sentences. This means that pupils do not develop their writing stamina sufficiently. It also results in pupils not being able to consistently practise applying accurately their existing skills in grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- Leaders for history and geography are able to explain the core strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum in the subjects for which they are responsible. Staff have considered how they can build knowledge sequentially over time so that pupils know and remember more.
- Senior leaders have sensible ideas about how they can address the weaker aspects of teaching in these subjects. These include actions to improve how teachers will assess pupils' skills at the end of a series of lessons. However, they have not planned these actions in a clear manner that can be communicated to subject leaders and staff. As a result, you and the governing body cannot check that these actions are logical and that they will have the impact needed.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the proportion of pupils who attain greater depth in writing is increased by providing them with sufficient opportunities to write at length, using longer sentences, so that they can practise their skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar
- leaders for history and geography produce clear plans to improve weaker aspects of the curriculum in their subject, such as ensuring that teachers assess how well pupils develop the skills that they need.

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

Yours sincerely

Roary Pownall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and shared my lines of enquiry. I also met with the chair of the governing body, a representative from the local authority and the subject leaders for English, geography and history. I scrutinised the responses of parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, read all free-text comments and

considered the views of those who had responded to the school's own recent questionnaire. I considered the responses from staff to Ofsted's questionnaire. We visited classrooms in all key stages. We looked at samples of work in different subjects for pupils across different year groups, including disadvantaged pupils. I observed children's behaviour in lessons and as they moved about the school. I met a large group of pupils to hear their views about the school and the education they receive. I viewed a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school's current performance and plans for its further improvement. I considered a number of policy documents, including those for safeguarding. I examined the school's website to check that it meets the requirements on the publication of specified information.