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Mrs Rosalind Robinson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Robinson

Short inspection of Firside Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 26 June 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 since the school converted to become an academy in 2016.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection of the predecessor school in 2015. At that time, you, as head of school, and an executive headteacher led the school. Since the school became an academy and joined the Wensum Trust, you have led the school as headteacher. The executive headteacher is now the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust. This has enabled you and the trust to maintain the school's performance and has added additional capacity to improve. The school is good and you, your governors and the trust share ambitions to improve it further.

You and your team of leaders demonstrate a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Self-evaluation is accurate and informs suitably prioritised plans for improvement. You can articulate clearly the reasons for variations in the outcomes achieved by pupils, and the actions being taken to resolve this. You and your governors value highly the support provided by the Wensum Trust, which enables you to focus on raising achievement and providing pupils with a safe, friendly environment in which to learn.

Over the past two years, outcomes achieved by pupils at the end of key stage 2 have been high. An above-average proportion of pupils in Year 6 have attained the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Significantly, the proportions of the most able pupils exceeding the expected standards have also remained high. Your latest assessments show that this trend of high achievement is expected to continue. Overall results in national tests this year are expected to be

above average.

Responses from pupils, parents and carers, and staff were overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Parents praised the efforts made by staff to provide their children with good opportunities to learn and ensure that they are fully prepared for the next stage. A few expressed that they would like better communication with staff about their child's progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

A recent review of safeguarding led by the local authority helped you to identify what aspects of safeguarding work well, and also a few areas that needed tightening up to keep pupils fully safe. You have acted on its recommendations and robust procedures are now firmly in place. You and two other designated leads for safeguarding work together to manage concerns raised by staff. Detailed online records are maintained systematically to ensure that concerns are followed up and monitored routinely. Links with external support agencies, and parents and carers are well established. Staff training in safeguarding, including the 'Prevent' duty, is up to date. Suitable assessments are in place to manage the risks attached to keeping pupils safe on the school site, but these procedures have not been fully tested to gauge that they work well enough.

Inspection findings

- To determine whether the school remained good, I followed four key lines of enquiry during the inspection. These were based on the school's published performance information and analysis of the school's and the trust's websites. I focused on: leaders' views about the progress made by all pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, the most able and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); the actions taken by you and other leaders to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and evaluate the impact this is having on the learning and progress of all pupils; whether school is a safe, stimulating and enjoyable place to be; and the effectiveness of the school's arrangements to safeguard pupils.
- Published data shows that the progress made by pupils from their above-average starting points in Year 3 is broadly average in writing and below average in reading and mathematics. Your views, and those of governors and the trust, based on your testing of pupils at the start of Year 3, are that the learning and progress of a small minority of pupils slow over the summer months following key stage 1 tests. When they arrive in school, these pupils need additional support to catch up with their learning. Furthermore, you also acknowledge that, in the past, not enough has been done to maintain the good start made by the most able pupils who arrive in Year 3 having exceeded the expected standards.
- This work has begun and is leading to improvement. Your teachers are liaising more closely with staff in local infant schools to moderate pupils' work and gain a better understanding of their assessments and procedures for teaching reading and mathematics. Recent staff training has focused on planning learning that

enables the least able pupils to learn effectively and also enables the most able pupils to progress well. This is leading to improvement, but at this stage remains 'work in progress'.

- The needs of the school's small proportion of pupils with SEND are known well, and this ensures that they receive help in lessons and additional support to help them make sufficient progress. Disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 made broadly average progress in 2017, but overall progress rates fell in reading and mathematics last year. To improve this, you have revised your plans for using pupil premium funding this year. You and your governors continue to monitor this group of pupils closely. You anticipate that the outcomes achieved by disadvantaged pupils in national tests this year will rise to above average.
- Findings from our joint observations of pupils at work in lessons supported your view that good-quality teaching enables pupils to make good progress. Recently qualified teachers and more experienced staff provide a good blend of established routines and fresh ideas. Staffing changes have led to a few inconsistencies. Your routine monitoring has identified where these lie and training is being provided to enable staff to develop their practice.
- Teachers forge good relations with pupils and manage pupils' behaviour well. Their planning is based on detailed subject knowledge. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively in lessons to support pupils' learning. Effective questioning and group discussion, and regular opportunities to share with their partners, enliven learners. Pupils work hard and are keen to contribute their ideas. They thrive on the regular praise provided by staff.
- In English, pupils' books show good examples of planning their work and regular opportunities to write at length. Regular, written feedback provided by teachers shows pupils how to improve their work. This makes a significant contribution to the development of their writing. A minority of younger, less able pupils need more help with their handwriting, and higher expectations of presenting their work neatly. My meeting with a small group of Year 3 pupils confirmed that early reading is taught effectively. All of them read with some fluency and knew what to do when they encountered difficult or unfamiliar words.
- In mathematics, teachers use the same mathematical language to ensure that pupils understand fully and to avoid any misconceptions developing. Learning is planned to match the different abilities of pupils. However, lengthy introductions and modelling of calculations for all pupils at the same time reduces the impact of this planning. Some tasks are too easy for the most able pupils. Their books show good examples of learning calculation of number, time, shape and geometry, but fewer opportunities to apply these skills in challenging problem-solving and reasoning tasks.
- The deployment of an additional teacher in Year 6 enables you to reduce significantly the number of pupils in each class so that teaching is matched to their different abilities. This also enables you to intervene to support those pupils at risk of underachieving and ensure that they are fully prepared for national tests at the end of the key stage. Your aim of securing good progress in reading, writing and mathematics has limited the time spent by leaders on promoting pupils' learning in foundation subjects. Routine assessment of learning in subjects

taught in the afternoons is new this year. More time is needed for this to become firmly established.

- Pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare are good. Teachers provide pupils with rich, stimulating environments in which to learn. Classrooms are calm and purposeful. Pupils' conduct around school was exemplary throughout the inspection. Your records show that pupils attend regularly and behave well. Very few pupils are excluded from school. Those pupils who met with me said that school is a safe, stimulating and enjoyable place to be. They feel safe in school and say that although bullying does happen, staff will always sort it out. They enthused about the off-site trips and residential experiences provided for them. In assembly, pupils' singing was exceptional and made a good contribution to their enjoyment of school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- their monitoring of teaching and learning focuses closely and reports upon whether the expectations teachers have of pupils are high enough and that learning fully challenges the most able pupils to achieve their very best
- assessment of pupils' learning and progress in foundation subjects becomes firmly established and shows clearly that, across all subjects, good teaching leads to good progress made by pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your team of senior leaders, a group of Year 6 pupils, a group of Year 3 readers, four members of the local governing body and the CEO of the Wensum Trust.

I attended an assembly. I walked the school grounds with the CEO at lunchtime to observe pupils at play. You joined me during the morning to observe pupils at work in lessons, and also to discuss the school's safeguarding arrangements.

I reviewed a range of documents, including your self-review and improvement plan, safeguarding policy and procedures including the single central record, and records of behaviour and attendance. I considered 23 free-text responses from parents

during the inspection, 12 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff and 28 responses to Ofsted's survey of pupils' views.