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Mrs Katherine Finch
Head of School
Thurlby Community Primary School
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Dear Mrs Finch

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Thurlby Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12 November 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in September 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Varnam
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in September 2018

- Improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - ensuring that senior leaders' and governors' plans for improvement fully address what needs to be done to rapidly improve the quality of provision and leadership
 - developing the skills of middle leaders so that they can improve the quality of teaching and outcomes in their areas of responsibility
 - urgently introducing a clear approach for checking that the interventions and support provided for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are having an impact, acting swiftly to make changes if they are not
 - ensuring that leaders evaluate the impact of the use of the pupil premium funding so they can allocate future funding to where it will make most difference for the pupils
 - improving the skills of governors and implementing a clear strategy for them to hold leaders fully to account.
- Eliminate inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, thereby improving outcomes for pupils, by ensuring that:
 - the recently introduced approach to assessment is fully embedded so leaders are able to check the progress pupils are making and act swiftly if this slows
 - teachers make effective use of assessment to plan and adapt lessons, providing appropriate levels of challenge and support so that pupils of all abilities achieve the standards they should
 - teachers and teaching assistants make effective use of questioning to develop pupils' understanding and maximise their progress
 - teachers insist on the same standards of pupils' writing across all subjects
 - teachers ensure that pupils develop their mathematical skills through problem solving and reasoning.
- Improve pupils' rates of attendance, including for those who are disadvantaged, by working more extensively with parents and carers and pupils to raise the importance of attending school daily.
- Improve the provision in the early years by:
 - ensuring the leaders' plans for improvement consider more fully what needs to be done to improve outcomes for children
 - improving the use of the outdoor space so that it promotes children's learning

effectively

- leaders making sure that adults make better use of assessment to plan learning that is more closely matched to children's stages of development.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 12 November 2019

Evidence

This inspection focused on the areas for improvement relating to leadership and management, the early years, pupils' attendance and the quality of education that pupils receive in English. The inspector observed the school's work and met with the executive headteacher; head of school; deputy headteacher; the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo); the designated leader for safeguarding; leaders responsible for English, mathematics, science and physical education (PE); three members of the governing body; two representatives of the local authority; and office staff. The inspector visited English lessons in all key stages and the provision in the early years. He scrutinised pupils' work in writing. The inspector scrutinised a range of documents relating to safeguarding and school improvement. He considered the local authority's statement of action, the school improvement plan and the external reviews of the effectiveness of pupil premium funding and governance.

Context

There have been some notable changes in staffing since the previous inspection. The previous headteacher retired in December 2018. The headteacher and deputy headteacher from Bourne Westfield Primary Academy took up posts as the executive headteacher and head of school in January 2019. The SENCo left the school at the end of the last academic year. The SENCo from Bourne Westfield Primary Academy is currently covering this post.

Two teaching staff left the school during the last academic year. Two new teachers joined the school in September 2019. Five teaching assistants left the school in July 2019. Some of these were due to redundancy. The governing body has remained largely unchanged since the previous inspection.

The school is currently receiving support from the local authority, Bourne Westfield Primary Academy and the Keystone teaching school alliance.

The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection

Senior leaders have ensured that the school's plans for improvement are effective. These include actions to improve leadership and management and the quality of education. Leaders and governors are clear about the impact these actions should have. They regularly check to make sure that planned improvements are made and quickly.

Senior leaders have focused on improvements in English, particularly in writing. Staff receive effective training so they understand the expectations of the national

curriculum. Teachers have a better understanding of what pupils need to know and by when. Leaders work with other schools to check teachers' assessments of what pupils can do. These are now accurate. Teachers use this information to plan future learning effectively.

The teaching of early writing and phonics is becoming more systematic and successful. Teachers model letters and sounds accurately and make sure that pupils remember these. Children in the early years are beginning to use this knowledge to write simple words. By Year 1 pupils write sentences with increasingly accurate spelling.

The teaching of writing in most year groups is improving. Teachers ask thoughtful questions to encourage pupils to think more deeply about what they write. Teachers are becoming increasingly skilled at developing pupils' vocabulary. They model and explain words such as 'curious' and 'ambition'. Some pupils use these in their own writing and are including more description. Most pupils, including those with SEND, are improving their writing over time. However, some pupils still have significant gaps in their knowledge and skills, particularly in Years 5 and 6. Leaders and teachers are prioritising this.

The quality of education in the early years is improving. Staff have a better understanding of what children can do when they start school. They use this information to plan activities that are closely matched to children's abilities in some areas of learning. The classroom environment is orderly and routines are well established. Leaders know that more work needs to be done to improve staff's interactions with children. Some staff do not use questions effectively to develop children's language or to deepen their knowledge and understanding.

The SENCo is a driving force for improvements to the provision for pupils with SEND. While there is still more to do, pupils with SEND receive better help to catch up and keep up than in the past. The SENCo, together with teachers, ensures that these pupils have specific plans to improve their learning. The plans identify what pupils find difficult and what teachers need to do to support them to achieve well. Some teachers are beginning to implement these plans effectively. For example, some pupils with SEND use adapted equipment to help them write. Others have visual prompts to help them understand words and language.

An external review of the effectiveness of the use of pupil premium funding has taken place. Leaders know what needs to be done to improve the provision for the most disadvantaged pupils. The funding is used to provide specific support for pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties. It is also used to improve teachers' subject knowledge and practice in English and mathematics. Teaching assistants have been well trained. They provide good support for pupils in the classroom and in small-group catch-up sessions.

Leaders work hard to make sure that most pupils attend school regularly. They

provide parents and carers with important information about attendance. They support families when pupils do not attend school regularly. They make referrals for early help when things do not improve. The school's attendance figure is now above that seen nationally. However, some of the most disadvantaged pupils are still absent too often.

The effectiveness of leadership and management at the school

Senior leaders from Bourne Westfield Primary Academy have been influential in stabilising and improving the school. They have worked to develop an effective team culture. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities and share senior leaders' ambitions for pupils.

Governors are increasingly effective at holding leaders to account for the actions taken to improve the school. They have worked with determination to improve their knowledge and skills. They have received effective training and support from a national leader of governance. They receive detailed information and reports from senior leaders. Governors regularly visit the school to check leaders' work. The governing body now fulfils all statutory functions.

Senior leaders are working to improve the quality of education in all year groups. They have invested in staff's professional development. Staff have had relevant training to improve pupils' achievement. For example, teachers now use a range of visual and physical apparatus in mathematics to model and explain learning.

Senior leaders ensure that improvements are not leading to increased workload for staff. They consider staff's well-being. Staff appreciate senior leaders' support. They recognise the investment made in their professional development.

Senior leaders are beginning to develop the skills of other leaders. This is still in the very early stages. Curriculum leaders are passionate and keen to do more to improve their areas of responsibility. However, they do not yet have a secure understanding of the things they need to improve. They do not know which aspects of the curriculum pupils do or do not achieve well in. Plans are in place to develop subjects other than English and mathematics in the coming months.

Senior leaders have enhanced the school's safeguarding arrangements. They understand the difficulties vulnerable pupils and families face. Leaders ensure that staff are well trained. They know how to recognise the signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm or abuse. Staff know who to report concerns to and how to record this information accurately. Leaders make timely referrals to other agencies to ensure that pupils are safe and get the help they need.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Senior leaders manage change well. They have prioritised plans for improvement so that actions are not unwieldy or burdensome for staff. They communicate these actions well so that staff engage effectively with the changes that are made.
- Senior leaders provide effective support for teachers. Teachers have raised their expectations of what pupils can achieve. Senior leaders hold teachers to account for the quality of education that pupils receive.
- Senior leaders and governors are an increasingly cohesive team. They understand the weaknesses that exist. They work together well to tackle these. The local authority, senior leaders and governors have effective plans in place to ensure that improvements continue.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders have not yet ensured that all pupils with SEND receive the support they need to achieve well. Some teachers need further training so they know how to adapt the curriculum for these pupils.
- Subject leaders do not have a strong enough understanding of the quality of education in their areas of responsibility. They need further training and support to develop a well-sequenced and ambitious curriculum.

External support

The local authority has brokered effective support for the school. The partnership with Bourne Westfield Primary Academy has improved leadership capacity. The executive headteacher and head of school have had a rapid impact in raising expectations and improving the quality of education that pupils receive. Specialist leaders of education from the Keystone teaching school alliance provide effective coaching and support to teachers. A national leader of governance, deployed by the local authority, provides strong support for governors.