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Dear Mrs Lawson

Short inspection of Thornhill Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 March 2016, 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 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education since the last inspection. Consistently good teaching ensures that pupils develop positive attitudes to learning at the school. Their song in assembly, 'This is our school', summed up their praise with the words 'It is just right for you and me. Thornhill's the place to be.' The high expectations you set as headteacher are a contributory factor. These are reflected in your accurate evaluation of the school and priorities for further improvement. You took every opportunity on our joint observations of lessons to make helpful suggestions to teachers and pupils. The current school focus on 'perseverance' discussed by pupils and staff throughout the inspection is reflected in their sustained hard work. Pupils heartily applauded the 'workers of the week' named in assembly and were competitive when sharing the attendance figures of different classes. Good behaviour is the norm in lessons and around the school.

Pupils develop a wide range of skills and knowledge. Subject leaders ensure that staff receive the support and training required to teach different subjects well. They meet regularly to plan together and network with other schools to learn from good practice. They monitor pupils' progress in the subjects they lead to inform their plans. For example, a 'wizard writing club' was introduced to help 19 pupils catch up. In mathematics, workshops for staff linked to a new scheme of work have supported the

introduction of more problem-solving approaches, to tackle a weaker aspect of pupils' skills. These strategies, together with work with parents to help improve pupils' progress in mathematics, show how the school has taken action following the previous inspection. Pupils' current work shows that they are responding well to the additional challenges provided. They leave the school in Year 6 with a secure understanding of the skills required to do well in subjects including science, history, geography and art.

You have managed the school's transformation from lower to primary school effectively. Although in 2015 you had your first Year 6 group you ensured that attention was also given to improving the achievement of younger pupils. Standards in the early years and in reading, writing and mathematics at key stage 1 rose. A larger proportion of pupils reached the higher levels than nationally. Pupils continued to progress well with their writing at key stage 2. Strong writing currently in Year 5 shows that the work you are doing to help pupils improve their work, including checks of grammar, punctuation and spelling, is paying off. The Year 2 pupils showed great enthusiasm for this approach. They proudly compared pieces of writing two or three pages long that showed their stamina and critical skills. This had followed a drawing challenge in art in which pupils had made three drawings of the same subject, each much stronger than the one before. They had learned how to review and refine their skills to great effect. Pupils take pride in their handwriting and present work well.

The additional responsibilities you give to pupils are taken seriously. For example, the school council is a well-organised and efficient group of Years 5 and 6 pupils who take an active part in the school. They shared questions they had prepared for teachers applying to work in the school and their plans to attract more use of the school library. Their involvement in revising the school's behaviour policy adds to their confidence that behaviour is managed well so that learning is rarely disrupted. Similarly, the display of playground rules outside contributes to pupils feeling safe at school. However, although parents and carers are very complimentary about the school, a very small proportion thought that actions taken to manage behaviour should be better explained to them. The family support worker employed by the school in partnership with others locally is contributing to effective liaison between the school and 22 families. This ensures that families in need of intensive support are helped at times of crisis, minimising the impact on pupils' education.

Governors have increased their expertise and efficiency since the last inspection following an external review instigated by the school. Additional training in skills such as data analysis, staff recruitment and safeguarding has enabled governors to provide additional support and challenge. Their strategic approach to the school's improvement is well informed by regular visits and comprehensive feedback provided by staff. Governors make effective use of external reports to inform the work of the school. This includes analysis of school websites to see how other schools have closed gaps in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils. Your review of the work of teaching assistants is an example of how you use such research.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's safeguarding policies and procedures meet all statutory requirements. You ensure that staff and governors are well trained and well informed about child protection. Training includes the 'Prevent' duty which now informs your approach to staff recruitment. Links with external agencies are very well managed. As designated safeguarding lead you ensure that staff, pupils and parents feel confident that any risks are assessed thoroughly and managed effectively. This includes clear expectations of pupils' behaviour and swift action to deal with any forms of bullying or discrimination. In class, opportunities to teach pupils about keeping safe are used effectively. For example, in the Reception class children role-playing in the 'construction site' understood the significance of their safety helmets, fluorescent jackets and hazard signs.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and governors are taking effective action to improve the school. Pupils' achievement in the early years and key stage 1 improved in reading, writing and mathematics. The school's first key stage 2 results showed that good progress was sustained in writing. Improvements in teaching and learning in mathematics are evident in pupils' books and in their understanding.
- The impact of the governing body has increased since the last inspection. Governors use information about pupils' progress effectively to provide challenge where it is needed. They visit the school regularly to see for themselves the quality of education and care provided. Their external communications contribute to generally strong parental satisfaction.
- Accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is used to deploy staff to leadership roles and responsibilities well suited to their expertise. This includes new appointments carefully chosen to strengthen the school's work. Middle leaders are well informed about the subjects they lead. They use professional development effectively to promote strong teamwork.
- Strong teaching in Year 5 and the decision to split Year 6 into two small groups is helping to accelerate pupils' progress. This includes more-able pupils and those who find learning difficult. Additional support for disadvantaged pupils is well informed by research into effective strategies used in other schools. However, disadvantaged pupils have not yet caught up with their peers.
- Teachers prepare a range of interesting activities that engage pupils effectively. They make the focus of lessons clear so that pupils understand what they are expected to achieve. In English and mathematics this approach is reinforced regularly by constructive feedback. In other subjects, less detailed feedback indicates gaps in teachers' knowledge which middle leaders are addressing.
- Pupils conduct themselves responsibly in lessons and around the school. They are enthusiastic learners who respond well to questions and challenges. Their perseverance, the school's current focus, is reflected in their lengthy writing which pupils have refined well. Any behaviour that does not meet your expectations is dealt with firmly. Pupils feel that behaviour is managed fairly.

- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils contributes to their confidence that school is a safe and stimulating place to learn. Assemblies are used effectively to ensure that pupils start their school work in a positive frame of mind. They develop pride in their work, evident in the care pupils take with their handwriting as they progress through the school.
- The school's safeguarding procedures ensure that pupils know who to turn to should they have any concerns. Wide-ranging work with families, including guidance provided by a specialist family support worker, contributes to high-quality care. Pupils, particularly the school council, take an active part in developing rules and regulations that they are all expected to follow.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- improvements in pupils' progress in the early years and in Years 5 and 6 are sustained so that pupils reach their full potential
- pupils at risk of falling behind are given specialist support early, linked to your plans to expand the role of teaching assistants
- gaps in teachers' subject knowledge are addressed in order to give pupils the same high-quality feedback they receive in English and mathematics
- leaders, including those new to the school, learn from the headteacher's approach to monitoring which includes swift challenge where required.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Her Majesty's Inspector scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection. Meetings were held with school leaders, representatives of the governing body, the local authority, staff, parents and carers. The inspection involved meetings with groups of pupils formally and informally and scrutiny of their work. All classes were observed jointly with you, as was an assembly. Additional documentation was analysed, including reports to governors, the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, and information about pupils' attendance, behaviour and welfare. The inspector discussed the school with parents over the telephone and in the playground, and analysed nine free-text messages and two responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, to make an analysis.