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Elizabeth Bradbury
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Dear Mrs Bradbury

Short inspection of Thorns Community Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 7 February 2017, 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 February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, ably supported by the head of teaching and learning, have continued to build on the school's strengths to ensure that the quality of teaching remains good. Leaders' decisions about teaching and learning are firmly rooted in the best interests of the pupils' personal and academic development. Leaders and governors have established a rich learning community at Thorns where pupils are successful and demonstrate a tangible enthusiasm for learning.

Teachers work hard to ensure that there is a strong focus on making learning meaningful and relevant. Pupils embrace learning, and most make good progress because of the exciting and engaging curriculum on offer. They are inspired and motivated by the topics they learn about, and are eager to talk about their learning. For example, children in Reception were keen to tell me about becoming junior palaeontologists and discovering a dinosaur leg bone in the school grounds. Through this topic, children effectively developed a broad range of skills, knowledge and understanding.

You have established a culture where learning is abundant and purposeful. As a consequence, pupils enjoy coming to school and demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. They understand that a willingness to try, and a determination to succeed, are important qualities to becoming effective learners. Pupils behave well because they are absorbed in their learning. They are polite to visitors and treat each other with respect. Almost without exception, parents are fully supportive and proud of

the school. They speak highly of the rich experiences that school provides and appreciate being kept well informed about their children's learning.

At the school's last inspection, you were tasked with increasing the percentage of pupils who attained higher levels in writing. A national change in curriculum and assessment has made attainment comparisons difficult. Nevertheless, the work of current pupils indicates that they are making good progress in writing, and are developing their skills and knowledge to achieve at greater depth.

You have addressed other areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Pupils' use of technology across the curriculum is better, and they have enhanced their skills in computing. There is now a consistent approach to the teaching of mental mathematics, although leaders recognise that pupils' recall of number facts still needs to be more rapid. There is further work to be done to ensure that all pupils are stretched in mathematics and provided with opportunities to achieve a deeper level of understanding. Currently, not enough Year 2 pupils who achieve the expected level of development in mathematics in the early years, attain working at greater depth compared to pupils with similar starting points nationally.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders take effective measures to keep pupils safe from harm. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. Staff understand that keeping pupils safe is everyone's responsibility and are clear about the correct procedures to follow when there are concerns. Staff receive comprehensive training and regular updates, which ensures that they are well prepared to identify any risks to pupils. Those responsible for safeguarding take swift action when a concern is raised. They are also relentless in pursuing other agencies if follow-up actions need completing. Leaders ensure that all staff and volunteers are appropriately checked to reduce the risk of unsuitable people working with pupils. A governor has an overview of safeguarding, and reviews the school's arrangements.

The curriculum contributes effectively to pupils' readiness for keeping safe, both within and beyond school. Pupils participate in Warwickshire's 'Taking Care' project which teaches pupils strategies to stay safe in a range of situations. Pupils told me that they feel safe in school. They were able to confidently talk about ways to reduce the likelihood of placing themselves in vulnerable situations. Almost all parents who completed the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, said that their children feel safe in school.

Inspection findings

- Pupils achieve well in the early years. A much higher-than-average proportion enter Year 1 having achieved a good level of development. By the end of Year 2, almost all pupils make at least expected progress over time and reach the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportions of pupils achieving at greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics are broadly

in line with national figures.

- Leaders have implemented a range of strategies which have helped to ensure that there is an increasing level of challenge in lessons. For example, pupils sometimes use a 'chilli challenge' strategy to select the right level of difficulty at the start of a task. As a result, pupils' learning time is maximised, and the work is more demanding. However, these strategies are not yet fully embedded and consistent across the school.
- Teachers provide helpful verbal and written feedback to pupils, which encourages reflection and deeper thinking. For example, in some mathematics lessons seen, teachers expected pupils to explain their calculations or test out ideas. This enabled pupils to have a greater depth of understanding about the subject. However, this is not yet consistent because pupils are not always given enough opportunities to develop their reasoning skills in mathematics.
- Pupils consolidate their learning in reading, writing and mathematics through regular practice and application of skills. Consequently, most pupils have a secure understanding of topics and concepts before moving on to harder work. However, in mathematics there is occasionally too much repetition and revisiting of previously learned concepts. This sometimes slows down progress and prevents pupils from moving on to more challenging work sooner. While the work of current pupils, including disadvantaged, indicates that progress in mathematics is improving, the rate of progress could be even faster.
- Current pupils' progress in writing, including disadvantaged pupils, is strong because tasks are often more open-ended and purposeful. Leaders' actions on improving pupils' grammar, punctuation and handwriting have paid dividends. Year 2 pupils write confidently for a range of purposes with well-constructed sentences that are grammatically correct. Most write in a neat joined style, and use a range of punctuation to good effect.
- Leaders' commitment to ensuring that learning experiences are meaningful and relevant enhance pupils' progress. For example, the work based around the book 'Mrs. Armitage on Wheels' provided pupils with a wealth of opportunities to deepen their knowledge and understanding. Visits and visitors add an extra dimension and depth to pupils' learning. On the day of the inspection, Year 2 pupils visited the British Motor Museum to learn about vehicles through the ages. These types of practical experiences support pupils well with generating ideas for their writing.
- Pupils enjoy being set challenges because they are taught to have a 'can-do' attitude towards learning and are prepared to try something new. Teachers enable pupils to recognise the satisfaction that learning brings and the importance of perseverance. As a result, enthusiasm for learning is infectious, and pupils try hard in lessons.
- Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development because they evaluate their work accurately. They seek the opinions of others, including pupils and parents, to accurately determine what the school needs to do next. They take into account a range of evidence to decide priorities for improvement and then act decisively. For example, leaders identified an issue with teaching in one key stage and immediately provided targeted

support, including seeking advice from the local authority. The matter was quickly rectified and pupils made rapid progress as a result, and achieved very good outcomes by the end of the year.

- Subject leaders closely analyse pupil assessment information, including the performance of key groups, and put in place the right actions to tackle issues. Leaders and governors regularly review the effectiveness of any new school initiative and make changes to provision as necessary to ensure that pupils benefit.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide regular opportunities for all pupils to be challenged in mathematics, so that more attain working at greater depth by the end of key stage 1
- pupils are moved on more quickly in mathematics once they have a secure understanding of a concept
- pupils secure rapid recall of appropriate number facts by the end of Year 1
- teachers set more tasks that require pupils to extend their mathematical reasoning skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim Hill
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

The inspection focused on specific lines of enquiry about:

- how well all pupils, including disadvantaged, are challenged in their learning, particularly in writing and mathematics
- leadership and its effectiveness in identifying priorities for improvement and evaluating the impact on outcomes
- the effectiveness of safeguarding, and how pupils are prepared to keep themselves safe.

During the inspection, I held discussions with you and the head of teaching and learning to discuss the school's self-evaluation summary. I met with a subject leader

and we reviewed a selection of pupils' books. I met with a group of staff to discuss safeguarding. I also held a meeting with governors and spoke on the telephone to your school improvement adviser. I joined the head of teaching and learning in short visits to lessons, where we spoke to pupils about their work and sampled some of their books.

I listened to pupils read, and also had a discussion with a group of Year 2 pupils. I evaluated a range of documents, including the federation's learning improvement plan and records about keeping pupils safe. The views of parents were considered through the 86 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, as well as discussions with parents before school. I also gathered the views of staff through the online staff survey.