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Ms Elspeth McMenemie
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Dear Ms McMenemie

Short inspection of The Metheringham Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Along with your established senior leaders and governors, you continue to provide strong leadership to this school. You drive a whole-school culture where, to use your words, it is 'our improvement plan'. Your staff understand what the school's priorities are and are highly committed to helping you implement your vision for excellence. You lead a happy, secure, motivated school.

The strong sense of warmth and happiness in the school begins at the gate when pupils and parents greet each other and staff at the start of the school day, and continues through lessons and free time. As one pupil said, 'It feels like home.' The school achieves a fine balance between striving for academic success and maintaining a focus on pupils' well-being. The culture was summed up well by one parent, who said that the pupils are 'pushed but not stressed'. Leaders and teachers are ambitious for their pupils, but they are equally keen to ensure that there are plenty of opportunities for pupils to experience a rich curriculum and develop their talents to the full. These include experience of the arts and sport, with many classrooms and corridors colourfully displaying exhibits from previous creative days. All pupils have the chance to learn a musical instrument in Year 5 and they talk proudly about their lessons on drums, clarinet or saxophone. Pupils say that they feel safe and that they are learning every day. Older pupils have lots of opportunities to get involved in the running of the school through positions such as member of the school council or sports crew and as junior road safety officers.

You and your leaders have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. For example, the checking of pupils' understanding and the use of targeted questioning are now regular features of teaching. Work in the early years has continued to be a strength of the school and lays down a solid foundation for the learning to come as the pupils get older. You acknowledge that teachers initially struggled to adapt their teaching so that pupils were able to reach the new higher expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2016, too few of the most able pupils in Year 6 achieved the higher standards in writing. You have used your links with partner schools to good effect, so that teachers are now more confident in teaching to these expectations. A good example is the tool that pupils use to check the variety of writing devices they use. Pupils I spoke with were proud to show examples of the high-quality writing that resulted from the use of the tool and how they had been able to improve their writing still further. Current progress information suggests that the school is back on track, and a greater proportion of pupils are expected to reach the higher standards in writing at the end of key stage 2.

Despite these improvements, providing increased challenge for the most able pupils is not fully embedded in all areas of the school. For example, although the new mathematics curriculum has enabled most pupils to thrive, a few of the most able would like to be further stretched. Pupils say that this would make their school even better. You acknowledge that there is scope for the systems for tracking the progress of pupils to be refined even further and that responding to the challenges of the new assessment system and sustaining raised expectations of pupils remain a focus for the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

You are the school's designated safeguarding officer, supported by a small team. As an experienced safeguarding leader and headteacher, you have detailed knowledge of the pupils in your school and the difficulties some of them face. You have ensured that staff and governors are well trained, not only through face-to-face and online courses, but also with shorter regular updates based on your own experience. The school has used the local area safeguarding audit to check the quality of its work and this has provided a helpful external eye. Staff awareness of safeguarding issues is maintained at a high level because keeping pupils safe is a discussion point throughout the year. Governors monitor aspects of safeguarding practice within their school visit programme.

The safeguarding policy and procedures are up to date and take account of the most recent legislation. A summary leaflet is available to visitors and this provides a helpful and easy guide for parents and carers. You ensure that safeguarding records are securely stored and that you have a detailed knowledge of the school's work with other agencies to ensure that each individual child is protected. Where necessary, you are prepared to take decisive and persistent action so that vulnerable pupils receive the help they need.

Pupils in the school say that they feel safe and are able to tell an adult if they are worried about a friend or themselves. They have also been taught to keep themselves safe. One very young pupil in a classroom we visited looked to make sure that I was wearing the school visitor badge and checked with you that I was a safe visitor to have in the room. Pupils also talked about what they have learned about using the internet safely. The school has tried to support parents with this so that the pupils are as safe as possible when using computers at home. However, although pupils were able to talk with confidence about how to stay safe online, they were less secure about online risks from people who hold extremist views. The pupils spoken to were happy to come to school and were clear that all people should be treated with respect. Last year, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils fell to be too low and you have been working on this with staff and parents. There have already been improvements since the summer, but this will be an important aspect of your work this year and beyond so that all your pupils are in school, safe and learning, when they should be. As a result of these examples and other ongoing care throughout the school, leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

Inspection findings

- As this was a short inspection, it focused on five questions, known as key lines of enquiry, one of which concerns the effectiveness of safeguarding and is covered above.
- You were already aware that the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals had slipped over the last three years and had already made sure that governors were aware too. As a result, active plans were in place, including individualised work with children and families by a well-respected member of staff known as the learning and family support worker. This post is funded through the pupil premium. You are also a key leader for this work, keeping a regular eye on attendance figures and intervening as necessary. As a result, the attendance of this group of pupils has risen. You and your team are now working intensively with the families of the small number of pupils whose attendance is below 90%.
- School leaders have made changes to the curriculum and to how important skills are taught with a new emphasis on 'how the children get there'. School assessment information about current pupils suggests that good progress is now being made across key stage 1, which builds on the very successful start in the early years. You are now starting to make links with the new higher aspirations in key stage 2 and considering how to ensure that those younger pupils who are capable of making accelerated progress to the highest standards are provided with opportunity to do so. You are committed to working further on this so that all pupils make the progress of which they are capable.
- After strong writing results in 2015, you and other leaders were disappointed that so few Year 6 pupils reached greater depth in their writing in 2016. Senior leaders and teachers have acted quickly to rectify this, with a range of activities within school and with external partners designed to make sure that in every year group, writing excellence can be taught and recognised accurately.

- Examples of pupils' excellent writing are displayed in the corridors and these provide good models for younger pupils to aspire to. School assessment information about current Year 6 pupils suggests that there will be an improvement in 2017. Leaders have a new tracking system in school to support greater analysis of pupils' progress from their starting points. Leaders intend to use it to enable easy identification of pupils who are thriving and who will welcome even greater challenge so that this area of work can improve further into the future.
- The school improvement plan for this year identifies reading as a high priority. This includes the enjoyment of reading, as well as ensuring that pupils make better progress in reading. School leaders seek to involve parents in this area too, so that the love of reading continues at home. Leaders have identified precise aspects of reading where the pupils need more help, such as reading stamina, and specific work has been completed or planned to address this. Current progress information suggests that girls are now progressing as well as boys and their attainment has risen. As with writing, teachers are engaging in moderation to make sure that they are clear about what the pupils need to learn for success in the new national curriculum. However, current progress tracking does not identify all groups from their starting points. Although there is effective work for disadvantaged pupils because of pupil premium funding, for example, leaders are not able to see how other, smaller groups such as middle-ability girls are currently progressing from their starting points. Leaders are confident that this will be possible using the new tracking system.
- You are confident that leadership at all levels across the school is strong and there is a great deal of evidence to show that you are right. School improvement plans identify a range of staff who lead on specific elements, and your inclusive approach has built a strong community of leaders who are proud to work at the school. There is a track record from previous years which shows that when school leaders tackle a problem, it is usually solved. A good example of this is the impact of work in mathematics.
- Governors are knowledgeable about the school as a result of their frequent monitoring visits, which link to the school improvement plan or other priorities. Summaries of these visits are communicated to parents on the school website. Governors reserve the more challenging conversations for their regular meetings. At all levels of leadership, there is a willingness to reflect on what is going well and where action to improve is needed. This willingness translates into well-researched actions and feedback to the governing body. This capacity to improve bodes well for the future.
- Finally, the conduct of your pupils is excellent. Both in lessons and in free time, they are courteous and polite but also warm and friendly. Their behaviour for learning in lessons is highly positive and they show kindness to each other. They are adamant that bullying is not a feature of life at your school and they are confident to explain how you and your leaders and teachers are helping them to learn and to be safe. This does not happen by accident and reflects the culture that has been created and maintained throughout the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to respond to the challenges of a new assessment system and increased expectations so that pupils' progress is at least in line or above national expectations
- progress from pupils' starting points forms a key element in pupil progress tracking
- they respond quickly when it becomes evident that trends are emerging in pupil groups
- they increase the amount and complexity of challenge for pupils who are able to reach greater depth by the end of Year 6
- effective strategies to improve attendance are maintained and developed, particularly for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils, so that the attendance and persistent absence of all groups are in line or better than the national averages.

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

Joanne Ward
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Prior to and during the inspection, I considered evidence from a range of sources and activities. I reviewed the previous inspection report and performance information from the school's data dashboard for 2015 and 2016. I also reviewed the school's website. I spoke with parents as they brought their children to school. Meetings were held with you, senior leaders and governors to discuss the school's progress since the previous inspection and agree the key lines of enquiry. I considered a range of documentation, including information about the progress of pupils currently in the school, and the school's self-evaluation and action plans. I looked at the school's safeguarding policy and records of actions taken to protect pupils' welfare, and checked the single central record of the checks on staff. Together with you, I made short visits to lessons, looked at the quality of work in pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their learning. I met formally with a group of pupils from across key stage 2 and looked at their work in writing and mathematics. I listened to three pupils from Year 2 reading. I observed pupils' behaviour in class, as they moved around school and at break- and lunchtime. I looked at records of pupils' attendance. I considered the 26 responses to Parent View as well as the free-text responses, the 15 replies to the staff survey and the 46 responses to the pupil survey.