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9 May 2017

Mrs Amanda Benton
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Benton

Short inspection of Thornhill Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 23 March 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Under your inspirational leadership, senior leaders and teachers have ensured that Thornhill has continued to improve. The very clear ethos of accepting, respecting and celebrating each pupil ensures that the school is warm and welcoming. Pupils appreciate this, and one stated, 'Everyone gets on really well here so that we all behave.' Staff say they are proud to be part of the Thornhill team. Staff know pupils and their families very well and relationships between them are very warm and respectful. This ensures that pupils and their families benefit from high levels of care and support.

Pupils are polite and enthusiastically welcome visitors to the school. Their conduct around school, in the dining room, in assemblies and on the playground is exemplary. Pupils are positive about their classroom work and learning. They listen carefully to their teachers and are keen to do their best. Pupils say they enjoy their time at the school and this is reflected in their regular attendance.

The broad, balanced and exciting curriculum has been enhanced since the last inspection. With an appropriate emphasis on English and mathematics, work is planned around a range of interesting topics that appeal to pupils' interests and enthusiasms. Pupils talked animatedly about visits out of school, such as a recent visit to a science adventure centre. Pupils are encouraged to live healthy lifestyles and they talk very enthusiastically about their 'daily mile' walk around the playground. They value this opportunity to talk to staff and their friends as they improve their fitness levels. The curriculum also helps pupils to learn about British

values. For example, they took part in a vote to select two school songs, so they understand democracy in action and, through their study of world religions, they are taught to respect others.

Improvements to teaching and pupils' outcomes in mathematics have been secured. It is clear from the work in pupils' books that teachers regularly give pupils problems to tackle in mathematics and this is contributing to better outcomes in mathematics. Teachers implement the school's policy of providing pupils with regular feedback about their work diligently and this helps to ensure that pupils' work is improved. The most effective teachers demonstrate their skills across the school to support the development of other staff. This sharing of good practice has contributed to the improved teaching, particularly in key stage 2.

There have been year-on-year improvements to the proportion of children reaching a good level of development at the end of the early years. The teaching of reading is effective and the proportions of pupils meeting and exceeding the standard in the Year 1 national phonics screening check each year have improved similarly. However, the attainment of some boys and disadvantaged pupils lags behind that of others stubbornly. You acknowledge that the results in the 2016 key stage 1 assessments and current work in books show that there is still more to be done to secure the very best outcomes for boys with average and above-average starting points and some disadvantaged pupils, particularly in reading and writing. The school's pupil premium strategy has been effective at contributing to the strong progress of disadvantaged pupils across key stage 2; this ensures that they are well prepared for their transfer to secondary school. However, you acknowledge that there could be refinements to better target support for disadvantaged pupils in the early years and key stage 1.

Pupils are proud of their work and talk with enthusiasm about the well-presented work displayed around the school and in their topic folders. Pupils' handwriting and presentation in these pieces of work are often of a high standard and many pupils are developing a legible handwriting style. However, this is not the case across the whole school and there are some inconsistencies in teachers' expectations. As a consequence, some work in pupils' books is not always well presented and handwriting is not always legible.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the leadership team have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality. Leaders ensure that rigorous checks are made on staff, governors, volunteers and regular visitors to the school to make sure that they are suitable people to work with children. Staff training requirements are up to date and leaders are aware of the latest good practice in safeguarding. Staff know the appropriate procedures to follow if they have a concern about a pupil's well-being. Leaders responsible for overseeing safeguarding ensure that any concerns are documented carefully and followed up appropriately. Parents value the presence of senior leaders at the school gates at the start and end of the day. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. For example, some pupils

speaking confidently about staying safe online and about the need to cross roads with care.

Inspection findings

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry. The first was how well leaders know the school's strengths and address weaknesses. It is clear that you, the governors and senior leaders know the school well. You all have very high aspirations for the school. Your effective leadership has ensured that the priorities from the last inspection have been tackled and, as a result, outcomes have improved, particularly in mathematics. You have identified areas where improvement was needed correctly. For example, following some concerns about reading, you investigated different approaches and sought out examples of effective practices from across the country. As a consequence, the teaching of reading is effective in key stage 2. You and senior leaders know where teaching is particularly effective and where teaching needs to be enhanced further and have identified the correct priorities for development this year.
- The local authority identifies correctly the many strengths at the school, particularly your effective leadership skills, and uses you and other leaders to support the work of other local schools with some success.
- The second line of enquiry was to see if the particularly strong progress at the end of Year 6 over the last two years reflected strong improvements in the quality of teaching across the school. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together to ensure that work is largely well matched to the needs of pupils. Teachers use their subject knowledge effectively to explain new ideas. They tailor questions to pupils' abilities to extend and probe pupils' understanding effectively. Although effective overall, there is a little variance in the impact of teaching on the progress of boys and disadvantaged pupils in the early years and key stage 1. You and senior leaders have identified this and have begun to identify strategies to address these variations.
- Another key line of enquiry was to ask why the progress of pupils at key stage 1, particularly boys and disadvantaged pupils, from average and better starting points was below average. Part of the reason for this relates to the variation in the effectiveness of teaching. Leaders' analysis of the 2016 outcomes highlighted the pupils who did not make as much progress as expected. As a consequence, these pupils are getting extra help now they are in Year 3. They are already beginning to show better progress in their written work.
- I also looked at the effectiveness of the teaching of early reading and writing. The teaching of phonics is effective. Teachers have good subject knowledge and model effectively the pronunciation and reading of different words. Pupils are enthusiastic about their daily phonics work in small groups. They listen carefully and this helps them to recognise letters and the sounds they represent. However, there is variation in the impact of this work and some boys and disadvantaged pupils do not always make the gains they could.
- The final line of enquiry was to find out what leaders had done to improve attendance and persistent absenteeism, particularly for boys and disadvantaged pupils. Attendance is broadly average but is a little lower for some disadvantaged

pupils and some boys. There are effective procedures in place to monitor daily attendance and to make contact with parents when any pupils' absence is unexplained. As a consequence, the attendance rates of individual pupils have improved from year to year. The above average rates of persistent absenteeism are largely explained by a relatively large proportion of pupils leaving the school, and the country, to return to their country of origin, without informing the school. Where this happened, the school worked with the local authority correctly to investigate the children who were missing from education but it was almost a term before the school was able to remove them from roll. The school's work with families still at the school shows that pupils identified as persistent absentees have improved their attendance rates.

- The large majority of parents that I spoke to, and those who responded to the Parent View survey, were very positive about the school and many commented positively about the school's 'community' feel. Almost all would recommend the school to other parents.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they refine further the school's strategies for developing the reading and writing skills of boys and disadvantaged pupils in the early years and key stage 1
- the quality of handwriting and presentation is more consistent across the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Amraz Ali
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher. I met with the two leaders responsible for literacy and five members of the governing body. I considered 10 responses from parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and spoke to parents at the end of the school day. I met with a group of pupils and heard a number of other pupils read. I visited classes to observe teaching and learning in several subjects and looked at a sample of pupils' work. I also looked at a range of documentation covering different aspects of the school's work.