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21 March 2017

Mrs Clare Armitage
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Armitage

Short inspection of Lowtown Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 8 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 December 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Despite being in post for less than two years you have brought about change within the school at a good pace and have successfully made the transition from deputy headteacher to headteacher. You have built a strong senior leadership team which has the capacity to continue to bring about improvement at an accelerated pace. A key area for improvement identified in your previous inspection was to develop the role undertaken by middle leaders. Staffing has changed as previous middle leaders have taken on greater responsibility. The new middle leaders are beginning to contribute to school improvement, however they have not yet fully developed the skills needed to help drive the school forward quickly.

You know your school very well. Parents clearly appreciate your open approach and commented positively on your 'ever-open door', which enables them to come and discuss issues as and when they arise. Staff describe working in the school as being 'part of a happy family'. This is clear evidence of the inclusive ethos within school that you and the leadership team have created, in which everyone feels valued.

Your and the governing body's vision that pupils will leave school having developed the values of respect, empathy, responsibility, honesty, resilience and tolerance threads through all that you do as a school. Older pupils spoken to commented on how school enables them to take responsibility both inside and outside the

classroom. For example, through undertaking roles such as playground sports leaders and healthy eating ambassadors, they feel they are making a direct contribution to improving the health and fitness of pupils. In class, by evaluating the quality of their own and others' learning, pupils learn to take responsibility for improving the quality of their own and others' work. Developing this valuable skill ensures that you prepare pupils well for secondary school.

Your evaluation of the school's performance is accurate and the areas for improvement the leadership team have identified are pertinent and relevant. Targets set for individual members of staff are closely focused upon bringing about this improvement.

While clearly disappointed at the standards reached by pupils in last year's national tests in English, you have acted swiftly and successfully to reverse this trend. Your painstaking research into the root causes of the dip and subsequent series of very focused actions have improved the quality of teaching and learning in both reading and writing across the school. Teachers' confidence in teaching reading skills has improved. Support from an external consultant has enabled staff to develop highly creative opportunities for writing such as the whole-school Shakespeare week. Working on this project has inspired and motivated pupils across the school to write at length. This is evidenced by the work displayed across school from Reception to Year 6.

Your very strong belief that pupils need to be able to speak to communicate their ideas, read and gain further ideas before becoming successful writers is very apparent in the school's investment in speech and language support. The enthusiastic and well-structured work undertaken by the specialist-trained teaching assistant has made a valuable contribution to pupils' improved gains in reading and writing.

As a result, pupils' progress has accelerated and currently nearly 90% of pupils in Year 6 are on track to reach expected standards or above in reading and nearly 80% in writing. Pupils in Year 2 are also on track to make very similar gains. This represents a significant rise when compared to last year for all groups of pupils, including the most able and disadvantaged pupils.

The magical qualities of the school's wildlife garden not only made an impressive backdrop to the work pupils undertook on Shakespeare's play 'A midsummer night's dream', but also contributed well to their work in science. Gardening club is just one of the many clubs and sporting opportunities offered which make a strong contribution to developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils spoken to during the inspection and those who responded to the online questionnaire say that they feel safe in school. They also said the work they undertake in learning how to stay safe online has helped them to be confident and careful when accessing the internet both at school and at home. Parents also

agreed that the recent training on keeping their children safe online had been both illuminating and very useful. Parents felt that the up-to-date information on teenager 'text speak' had been particularly relevant and had improved their confidence when monitoring their childrens' phone use.

You have ensured that safeguarding practice in school remains effective and in line with the very strong ethos of safeguarding within school. Staff spoken to during the inspection were clear about the roles and responsibilities they play in keeping pupils safe. The staff's understanding of the requirements of current legislation is sound.

Safeguarding practices, including those relating to recruitment of staff, and the keeping of a single central record meet requirements.

Inspection findings

- In my pre-inspection planning, I noted that last year pupils made less progress in writing in both key stage 1 and 2 than others pupils nationally. In order to ascertain the reasons behind this dip I met with senior leaders. I also observed learning in literacy lessons across the school accompanied by yourself and while in classrooms scrutinised the work in pupils' books. I looked at pupils' previous work on displays around the school and talked to the English coordinator. My observations of the work in pupils' books showed clearly that the vast majority of pupils are now making accelerated progress in writing. Observations of learning in classrooms further evidenced the high expectations of staff regarding the standards of work pupils need to produce. Further analysis of progress information produced by your leadership team on pupils' progress towards challenging targets demonstrates clearly good and better progress in writing over time.
- At the start of the inspection, I was keen to ascertain why pupils in key stage 1 made better progress in mathematics than in reading and writing. I also wanted to find out whether this was true for current pupils in Years 1 and 2. It became apparent from my initial discussions with senior leaders that improving standards and pupils' progress across key stage 1 had been a key focus for the senior leadership team since the start of the school year. Information you had collected on pupils' progress demonstrated that your focus on developing pupils' ability to retell stories, practise vocabulary and talk about pieces of text in both Year 1 and 2 has already accelerated the progress made by pupils in both year groups. Work in books also demonstrates this progress clearly.
- An area for improvement identified in your previous inspection was to develop the role undertaken by middle leaders in improving pupils' progress and the quality of teaching and learning. It quickly became apparent that you, as a new headteacher, had carried out a restructure of your leadership team and had recruited some new staff, including a new lead for science. These new appointments have had an impact on the role middle leaders are currently playing in supporting senior leaders. You recognise more work is needed before the new middle leaders are able to fully support your senior leadership team. You also acknowledge the support middle leaders are receiving from the learning partnership of schools to which you belong, which has increased their confidence

and knowledge.

- The governing body has recently completed an audit of their skills and knowledge linking to recent national guidance. This exercise demonstrated that in some areas the governing body needs to improve and develop new skills. Individual governors have responded to this well and changes within the framework of governance are planned but have yet to be implemented.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- current planned strategies to bring about improvement in writing across the school continue at a swift pace in order to enhance further pupils' progress in writing
- the role middle leaders play in bringing about improvement in pupils' outcomes increases further
- planned improvements to the structure and function of the governing body continue.

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

Yours sincerely

Marian Thomas
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, your senior leaders, school staff and three members of the governing body. I also met informally with 12 parents and carers at the beginning of the school day. I spoke with pupils both inside and outside the classroom. I also scrutinised a range of documents including safeguarding documents, behaviour and attendance files and the school's system for measuring pupils' progress. I also took into account the views of parents who contacted the inspection team through the online questionnaire Parent View and the views of 26 members of staff who also completed an online questionnaire.