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Mr Martyn Cartledge
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Dear Mr Cartledge

Short inspection of Forest Town Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 2 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 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 have successfully established a culture where staff, pupils and governors share your determination for every pupil to succeed. Your thorough self-evaluation is underpinned by a strong understanding of effective teaching and learning, and the needs of your school community. This has enabled you to accurately identify and take effective action to bring about necessary improvements across the school.

Improvement has been more rapid during the past 18 months, following the appointment and establishment of a strong leadership team. You and your team have effectively implemented wide-ranging actions for improvement, including new systems for assessment, curriculum planning in English and mathematics and approaches to teaching. There have also been significant staff changes during this time that school leaders have managed carefully, to strengthen and improve teaching. There is a rigorous and relentless focus on improving teaching and raising attainment that is understood by all and is effectively addressing previous areas for improvement.

Governors are well informed and share leaders' ambitions for the school. They work closely with school leaders in monitoring the impact of actions taken by staff to improve the school and asking challenging questions, thus effectively contributing to the drive to improve pupils' outcomes.

In discussions, governors, staff, pupils and parents recognised that there have been considerable recent improvements to pupils' learning and progress. The school has had an historical trend of persistently low attainment over a number of years. However, in 2016, against the backdrop of raised national expectations, writing progress exceeded national averages in key stages 1 and 2. Also, the proportion of pupils achieving at age-related expectations in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 was very close to the national average. From low starting points, these results represented considerable improvement. They were consistent with leaders' evaluation of the impact of carefully planned training on improving the quality and consistency of teaching of writing and mathematics. Evidence seen in lessons, from talking to pupils and by looking at their work, shows that these improvements have continued to be built upon. For example, teachers' planning now routinely includes additional learning opportunities that will provide pupils with even more challenge. However, teachers are not all equally skilled at swiftly moving pupils on to these more challenging activities so that they make even more rapid progress.

The school's latest assessment figures and work seen in books show that pupils are currently on track to achieve challenging targets in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2. However, you and your leadership team know that, despite a profile of low prior attainment, there are a number of pupils who have the capacity to make even more rapid progress and to exceed the expectations for their age. You recognise the need to be quick to identify these most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, so that they can be provided with more challenge and opportunities to improve and deepen their understanding and so that the proportion of pupils who achieve above-age expectations rises to be at least in line with national averages.

Developing positive attitudes and raising aspiration are at the heart of the school's vision of 'belonging, aiming high and succeeding'. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes across all elements of the school day reflect this. Pupils are courteous and polite to each other, adults and visitors. They are quick to respond to adult requests within class and around the school. Across classrooms, pupils are confident and keen to explain and share their learning with each other and adults. Pupils told me that their learning is improving. Older pupils said they were relishing the challenge of more regular tests and feedback, because it reinforces their confidence that they are improving. A pupil who joined the school in key stage 2 explained that he was a 'bad writer' when he joined the school, but that now he can write properly. He said teachers helped him to write better and be neater, and then 'cheered me on'.

Leaders are working hard to promote the importance of high levels of attendance in enabling pupils to succeed. However, they know that there is still more to be done to support a particular group of pupils and their families to understand the importance of good school attendance.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You have a strong system in place and staff are confident to report any concerns they may have regarding a child's welfare. All staff understand their responsibilities and the particular risks for your community. Your designated safeguarding lead makes sure that timely referrals are made to outside agencies and stringently followed up, so that pupils and their families receive the help and support they need. The school has invested in providing highly effective nurture provision, as well as a family worker and attendance officer. These are effective in providing tailored individual programmes of support for the most vulnerable pupils.

An overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, and who spoke to me on the day of the inspection and responded to a recent school questionnaire, said that their children were safe and well cared for in school. Pupils say that they feel safe. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe. You have provided opportunities for them to learn about issues such as e-safety. Pupils told me that bullying is rare, but that adults listen to them and are very good at sorting out any problems. New pupils, including pupils who are at the early stages of learning English, are supported carefully and settled quickly. A pupil that had joined the school during key stage 2 said he was 'welcomed with open arms, because we're all equal here'.

Inspection findings

- You and the leadership team have an accurate view of where teaching is strongest and improvements most skilfully embedded. You use this information well to ensure that where teaching is less effective teachers are able to learn from strong practice and are effectively mentored to improve. The leadership team is committed to drawing on expertise from other effective schools and research. The local authority has effectively signposted sources of strong practice and supported collaboration with other schools. Governors are also actively involved in developing and promoting further collaboration. This commitment to looking outwards has been central to recent rapid improvements.
- In 2016, in contrast to writing and mathematics at key stage 2, reading results dropped even further behind national averages. However, you swiftly identified the reasons for this. Effective training and development of teaching approaches and investment in appropriate teaching materials mean that teachers across the school are showing increased consistency and clarity in teaching effective reading skills. This is having a positive impact on increasing pupils' fluency, stamina and understanding. Scrutiny of teachers' current reading records and planning shows strong progress for the majority of pupils, due to sharply focused assessments and consistent follow-up of planned next steps. Pupils who read to me showed confidence and enthusiasm. The promotion of reading is visible across the school. Home reading is celebrated, with children earning a book to keep for every 60 reads. Parents are invited in to 'Read every Friday' with their children. Older

pupils were keen to tell me how much they felt 'RIC' (retrieve, interpret, creator's choice) is improving their reading comprehension.

- The leadership team understands the importance of close tracking and timely adaptation of interventions for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils. Improvements to school assessment systems and rigorous tracking through regular review of pupils' progress are being used well to sharpen the identification of pupils' needs. Interventions are more precise and are having a greater impact. The special needs coordinator was able to share clear evidence of improved progress for lower-attaining pupils from their various starting points. The school supports a number of very vulnerable pupils, with complex needs. Leaders know the key barriers for these pupils often relate to social and emotional skills and ensure that pupils receive sensitive and highly skilled support to improve their readiness for learning. Leaders, including governors, ensure that the pupil premium is carefully spent to improve progress and outcomes. They know the context of the school, exacerbated by high levels of pupil mobility, means that this is an ongoing area of priority. As well as supporting low-attaining disadvantaged pupils, leaders know that more needs to be done to identify those who have the potential for high attainment.
- Children join Nursery with skills typically well below those expected for their age. The percentage of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception has remained consistently at, or close to, national levels over recent years. Given low starting points, this means that the majority of pupils are making at least good progress. However, the difference between the attainment of boys and girls is consistently higher than that found nationally, with girls doing better than national averages and boys doing less well. While the early years leader can convincingly show that this is still good progress for boys, she is ensuring that there is a continual push to bring boys' attainment closer to national averages for all children and to the attainment of girls. The early years leader is highly skilled and is providing effective training for the whole early years team. Observations during the inspection supported leaders' evaluation that it is an enabling environment that has a strong focus on building skills ready for reading, writing and mathematics. Specialist training from a speech and language therapist is securing effective modelling and extension of language across Nursery and Reception. Leaders know that the push for accelerated progress, especially for boys, is an ongoing challenge and priority.
- You and the governing body are very committed to improving the attendance of disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils, particularly those who are persistently absent from school. You ensure that stringent action is taken, and the attendance officer and family support worker are effective in challenging low attendance and supporting families to improve. Actions have had considerable impact this year and current persistent absence for disadvantaged pupils has dropped from 21.7% in 2016 to 11.3%. Nevertheless, you and the governors understand that this will continue to be an aspect that requires ongoing robust action.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- recent rapid improvements in teaching and pupil outcomes are sustained and built upon consistently across all year groups
- those pupils with the potential to attain higher, especially disadvantaged pupils, are identified and supported to make more rapid progress
- teachers consistently move pupils swiftly on to further challenge in their work
- leaders continue their rigorous work to improve attendance in order to bring disadvantaged pupils' attendance in line with the national average.

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

Yours sincerely

Mandy Wilding
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I spoke with parents at the start of the day and met with you, senior leaders, middle leaders, and representatives from the governing body, including the chair of the governing body. I also spoke to a representative from the local authority. I listened to pupils reading and spoke with a group of pupils from key stage 2 about their school experience, as well as talking to pupils in classes and at playtime. You and I visited nearly all classes and examined pupils' workbooks from across the school. In addition, I scrutinised a range of the school documents, including those relating to the progress of pupils, the school's improvement planning, its self-evaluation, governing body minutes, staff development and documents relating to safeguarding. I took account of 13 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and the 11 responses from parents to the Ofsted free-text service. I also considered a recent parent questionnaire undertaken by governors. I took account of 36 staff responses to Ofsted's online staff survey and 75 pupil responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.