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17 April 2018

Miss Alison Kelly
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Dear Miss Kelly

Short inspection of Moorlands Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 27 March 2018, 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 March 2014.

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 addressed the large majority of areas for improvement that inspectors identified in the last report. You have developed ways of more strongly motivating pupils to learn, for example by introducing themed learning weeks based around science or the humanities every half term. In conversation with me, pupils spoke knowledgeably about what they had learned in these lessons and said that they find them highly enjoyable. Through these themed weeks, you have also provided more opportunities for pupils to use skills they learn in English lessons, such as writing, in other subjects.

You have made improvements to the effectiveness of leadership since the previous inspection. Subject leaders have received training provided by the National College for School Leadership. They now devise appropriate action plans for their subject and make more regular and thorough checks on standards. You have also put in place a new assessment and tracking system for subjects other than English and mathematics. However, you acknowledge that this is still in its early stages and that, consequently, subject leaders do not yet have a complete overview of pupils' progress in each subject.

You and senior leaders now draw up plans for school improvement that contain many well-focused actions and suitable ways of checking their impact on pupils' achievement. However, you recognise that, in some of your planned actions, the

purpose is unclear and your evaluations of their effectiveness lack precision or direct relevance to pupils' achievement.

You are clear about the school's current priorities. You recognised the dip in achievement in writing and in mathematics at the end of Year 6 in 2017. You have correctly identified areas to improve, based on a detailed analysis of the published assessment information. These are key focuses in this year's plans for school development. More importantly, you have taken swift and effective action to bring about the necessary improvements. I will expand on these later in this letter.

Since the previous inspection, you have developed a wide range of activities to deepen and enrich your pupils' learning. The school's choir and orchestra, for instance, successfully develop pupils' musical skills. Pupils regularly perform in public, which effectively supports their self-confidence and spiritual development. You have recently introduced an 'achievement and enrichment' afternoon every week, which is a renewed version of your previous 'options' afternoons. During this session, pupils have the opportunity to take part in a variety of activities, ranging from origami to fitness training in the small gymnasium you have set up. You also provide several after-school clubs, which contribute well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. These include football, netball, science and film clubs.

You have ensured that the learning environment is inviting and well kept. Pupils say they enjoy school and that their teachers work them hard. They show positive attitudes to their learning and they behave well.

The majority of parents and carers who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, were positive about the work of the school. They typically commented on how happy their children are at school, and about the broad and interesting curriculum you provide. A small proportion expressed concern about recent test results, but you have taken effective action to address this issue.

The local authority has a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and provides appropriate support, including the use of associate school improvement advisers. The local authority had concerns about the test results for Year 6 at the end of 2017, which it shared with the school. Advisers are now confident that leaders have taken effective action to address the weaknesses indicated by those results. Evidence gathered during the inspection substantiates this position.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and thorough. As the designated safeguarding lead, you respond to concerns promptly, referring pupils to other agencies, such as children's services, when required. The school's record of the necessary checks on members of staff is complete and complies with government guidance.

The culture of safeguarding in the school is strong. Your staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding procedures and are fully aware of the various signs of abuse to which they must be alert. Pupils feel safe in the school. They spoke about the ways in which staff teach them about safety, including how to protect themselves from the risks associated with the internet. Governors oversee the school's safeguarding procedures effectively and scrutinise regular reports from senior leaders.

Inspection findings

- At the start of my visit, we agreed a number of key lines of enquiry for the inspection. I have already written about how successfully you have addressed the areas for improvement that inspectors identified at the previous inspection. I have also written about the effectiveness of safeguarding in the school.
- Another focus for my visit was the achievement of current pupils in writing. Although attainment in Year 6 was close to the national average in 2017, progress was below average. This cohort included a significant number of pupils who had education, health and care plans and who attended the school's specialist unit. In response to the disappointing results, you have provided training for staff in the moderation of writing this year, in collaboration with the local authority. This has helped teachers to understand better what skills pupils need to improve their achievement and has strengthened the quality of teaching. As a result, current pupils, across almost all year groups, make strong progress. Pupils of middle ability in Year 5, for instance, confidently use interesting phrases such as 'towering over the irregular shaped houses.' Pupils of similar ability in Year 6 write reports of investigations in science, accurately using technical language such as 'variables' and 'conclusion'. The school's assessment information shows that much greater proportions of pupils are on track to meet or exceed expectations for their age group this year.
- My next key line of enquiry concerned the achievement of current pupils, especially those in the middle prior attainment group, in mathematics. Achievement in the Year 6 test in mathematics in 2017 was below the national average. You have successfully introduced a wide range of strategies to bring about improvement. These include a restructuring of the timetable to include dedicated lessons in skills in arithmetic and a greater emphasis on developing mathematical reasoning. You also commissioned an independent consultant to provide support and training for staff. These strategies have been effective. The school's assessment information and evidence from pupils' books show that most current pupils, including those who have middle prior attainment, make strong progress. Sometimes, however, there is a lack of challenging work for the most able pupils. You also recognise that you must continue with your strategies to ensure that pupils make sustained, strong progress.
- Another key line of enquiry related to the progress that disadvantaged pupils make in English and mathematics. Evidence from pupils' books and from assessment information shows that across most year groups, current pupils' progress is strong. Pupils in Year 6 are on track to achieve much more highly than in 2017. The difference between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and that of their peers nationally, who are not disadvantaged, is diminishing. You

have put in place a more effective programme of support for this group of pupils. For example, there are individual sessions with eligible pupils to support their learning in reading, comprehension or mathematics.

- Finally, leaders understand their responsibilities well. The school's website is up to date and complies with government regulations. Governors are clearly aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They challenge leaders rigorously, holding them to account effectively across a range of matters, including pupils' achievement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue with their strategies to improve pupils' achievement in writing and in mathematics to secure sustained, strong progress
- they make sure that teachers more consistently provide challenging work in writing and mathematics for the most able pupils
- they firmly establish their new assessment and tracking system for subjects other than English and mathematics, so that leaders of these subjects have a more complete overview of standards
- they ensure that they more consistently evaluate the impact of their actions for school improvement and relate their success criteria to pupils' achievement.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Quinn
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

With you, I carried out short visits to all year groups in the school. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation summary, action plans for school improvement, minutes of meetings of the governing body and records connected with the safeguarding of children. I held discussions with you, other members of staff, governors and pupils. I also had a discussion by telephone with a representative of the local authority. I analysed pupils' work and the school's own assessment information. I evaluated 89 responses received through Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. There were no other survey responses.