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Mr Ian Shuttleworth
Head of School
Pontefract Larks Hill Junior and Infant School
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Dear Mr Shuttleworth

Short inspection of Pontefract Larks Hill Junior and Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 25 June 2019, 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 July 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. After a period of staff turbulence since the previous inspection, you have made significant improvements following your appointment as head of school in September 2018. Your vision that every child should be the 'very best version of themselves' is modelled through your high expectations of what they can achieve. For example, you insist that pupils look smart in their uniforms and that they present their work to a high standard so that they have a sense of pride in themselves and their learning. You have worked with trust leaders to ensure a relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Pupils behave well and demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning. Classrooms buzz with excitement and activity. The school's ethos of developing pupils' skills by cooperating and supporting each other permeates the school. Pupils regularly debate and discuss what they are learning. They collaborate well and are confident to ask each other questions to deepen their own understanding. For instance, during the inspection in a mathematics lesson, pupils were fully engaged in discussing the possibilities of the value of a missing angle and exploring each other's understanding of shape.

Pupils have a strong understanding of the school values of respect and equality. They are tolerant of difference and respectful towards different faiths and cultures. Pupils said that if someone new arrived at the school they would 'treat them exactly the same as everybody else'. Pupils report that incidents of bullying are very rare because of the respect they have for each other. This is fostered through assemblies and events such as World Culture Day, where pupils learn about the diversity of language, religion and foods from other cultures.

Pupils enjoy the wide variety of sporting activities on offer. They talk with excitement about competing in the 'inter-house cup', which they all have a role in. Pupils appreciate that they have the opportunity to participate and compete in a range of activities such as football, dancing events, golf, and the 'daily mile', to name a few. Pupils talk with confidence about the importance of living a healthy lifestyle.

Parents and carers feel well informed about what is happening in school. Most parents appreciate the regular newsletters and events which help them to feel part of the school. They acknowledge the improvements that have been made to ensure that more pupils are making the progress they should.

At the previous inspection, senior leaders were asked to ensure that the checks made on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress involved middle leaders. The introduction of a formal monitoring system, supported by trust leaders, means that middle leaders are now fully involved in checking pupils' progress across a wide range of subjects. Since the previous inspection, leaders have ensured that expectations of pupils' presentation are consistent across the curriculum. As a result, most pupils produce their very best work in all subjects.

A further area for improvement identified at the previous inspection was to improve the progress made by boys. Leaders ensure careful monitoring of pupils' progress, which focuses on each individual pupil. This ensures that intervention is implemented quickly if a pupil is at risk of falling behind. As a result, boys' progress has improved since the previous inspection, particularly in mathematics. Most-able boys now receive work matched to their needs and so make more progress across key stage 2. However, leaders recognise there is still more work to do to improve the progress of boys further. Currently, too many pupils, especially boys, do not meet the higher standard by the end of key stage 2 in reading and mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. As the designated safeguarding leader for child protection, you are unrelenting in your focus to ensure the safety and welfare of all pupils. You ensure that staff safeguarding training is regularly updated. Consequently, all staff understand the important role they play in keeping children safe. Staff understand the potential risks in the local community and what to do if they have any concerns about children. All of the appropriate pre-employment checks are carried out on staff to ensure that they are safe to work with children.

Pupils show respect for each other. They report that bullying is rare and say that they feel safe in school. Pupils use the worry boxes in the classrooms to alert adults to any concerns they may have. Pupils, who made their views known, told me that there is a trusted adult in school they can talk to.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, I wanted to check how well children are supported to quickly learn to read. In 2018, the proportion of pupils passing the Year 1 phonics screening check was below the national average. Since your appointment in September 2018, you have made improving the quality of phonics teaching a priority. You have ensured that all staff are trained to deliver daily phonics sessions to children in Reception and pupils in Year 1. As a result, the proportion of pupils passing the phonics screening check this year has improved markedly. However, there is still some variability in the quality of phonics teaching, particularly from teaching assistants. This means that some children do not get off to the very best start in their reading.
- Sometimes the books that pupils use to practise their reading are not well matched to their phonic knowledge. As a result, some pupils are given books which they are not able to read. This is particularly the case for the weakest readers. Not all adults are sufficiently well trained to notice this and ask pupils to guess words from the pictures or by using the rest of the sentence. This means that gaps in some pupils' phonic knowledge are not picked up quickly enough.
- Pupils' progress by the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics has been in line with pupils with similar starting points nationally for the last three years. However, pupils' attainment in reading at the end of key stage 2 was below the national average in 2018. As a result, you have made improving reading a main priority. You have established a strong reading culture across the school. Pupils enjoy listening to their teachers read aloud to them and talk with interest about the stories and poems which are selected. Pupils told me that they enjoy reading for 'the 3 Ps', pleasure, purpose and productivity. This supports pupils to develop a rich vocabulary. Pupils are confident to contribute to class discussions and debates. Some pupils participate in public speaking events organised by the school.
- Teachers ensure that class texts are carefully selected to enhance pupils' vocabulary and understanding of what they are learning. Pupils are enthusiastic about the knowledge they gain from reading. For instance, after reading a book on ancient Greece, pupils spoke enthusiastically about the Athenians and Spartans and the differences in their education systems. This enhanced their understanding of what life was like during the time period and the differences between the two city-states.
- During the inspection, I wanted to check the opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills through problem-solving and reasoning. You have rightly prioritised developing pupils' problem-solving skills. Consequently, leaders ensure that pupils are given more opportunities to reason and solve problems in their mathematics lessons. Increasingly, this means that pupils are able to deepen their knowledge through investigations and discussion with their peers. Teachers assess the level of knowledge and understanding of each pupil to ensure that activities are well matched to their needs. This means that time is not wasted for pupils who are ready to move on. However, you acknowledge that more needs to be done to ensure that a higher proportion of the most able pupils attain the higher standards in mathematics.
- Leaders, supported by the trust, have developed a curriculum that enthuses and excites pupils. Teachers plan learning which builds sequentially over time. This provides opportunities for pupils to revisit and consolidate their learning across the curriculum.

- In science, pupils are able to apply their knowledge by carrying out practical experiments regularly. They then use these experiments to draw tables, graphs and diagrams and to write conclusions. Pupils show their pride and enthusiasm in their science and record their work with high standards of presentation throughout. Additionally, they are able to use the scientific vocabulary they have learned in their writing in a way that supports their understanding and enhances the quality of their work.
- You ensure that pupils understand the importance of good attendance. As a result, pupils' attendance is above the national average and persistent absence is well below the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- adults match pupils' reading books to their phonic knowledge so that pupils improve their reading fluency
- inconsistencies in the teaching of phonics are eradicated so all pupils get off to the very best start in their reading
- a higher proportion of the most able pupils attain the higher standards in reading and mathematics by the end of key stage 2.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wakefield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Knox
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the assistant headteacher and the curriculum leader. I met with two members of the governing body and held a meeting with a trustee and three members of the executive board from the multi-academy trust.

I scrutinised a range of documentation relating to the school's work, including the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan, information about pupils' progress, minutes of governing body meetings, behaviour and attendance records, and information about safeguarding.

I considered the 38 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also spoke to some parents at the start of the school day.

I met with six pupils from Years 4, 5 and 6 and I listened to some pupils read to their teacher. I also met with five members of staff.

I visited every classroom with you to observe teaching and learning and scrutinise pupils' work. I also looked at the work in pupils' books with the science and curriculum leaders.