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Mr Richard Porter
Principal
Thurcroft Junior Academy
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Dear Mr Porter

Short inspection of Thurcroft Junior Academy

Following my visit to the school on 3 July 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 February 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 fostered a strong team spirit among your staff. As a result, members of staff are highly supportive and committed to doing the best they can to ensure that pupils succeed and are kept safe in school. School governors and executives of Aston Education Community Trust say they are proud to be associated with the school. They are particularly proud of the impact of the school's work on maintaining the quality of education and of the behaviour and attitudes of pupils.

Parents and carers I spoke to, and those who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View, said their child is happy and safe in school. Parents value the work of leaders and teachers. One parent commented, 'I can't praise this school enough'. Others said that the school, 'has been excellent in giving extra help and support to my children' and 'students are pushed to achieve'.

Pupils told me that they enjoy the school. They wear their uniform with pride. They told me that lessons are fun, but also challenging, and this helps them to make good progress. Leaders and teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Several pupils were delighted to show off their 'impeccable behaviour' badges that they had been awarded for exemplary conduct. Staff, parents and governors say that these rewards have had a very positive impact on maintaining pupils' good behaviour and attitudes to learning since the previous inspection.

Your evaluation of the performance of the school is comprehensive and accurate.

You are clear about the strengths and weaknesses of the school and you share this with your staff, governors and the trust. Governors' understanding of the school's performance information and their experience in checking aspects of the school's provision enable them to work well with you to determine the main priorities for development.

Governors and trust executives fully understand their role and have a broad range of expertise that enables them to carry out their responsibilities effectively. While they are supportive of you and your staff, they continuously challenge you and school leaders to take action to address any underachievement. Governors ensure that they evaluate how successful you are in addressing the priorities for development.

Displays around the school show that pupils enjoy learning in a range of subjects. Pupils' work on display is of high quality and well presented. However, the same high quality of work and presentation is not always reflected in pupils' work in their books.

Displays on ways pupils can keep themselves safe and healthy are highly visible. The breakfast club enables pupils to enjoy a healthy breakfast and physical activities at the start of the day. Sport and physical activities have a high profile. Pupils of all ages have opportunities to participate in a range of inter-school competitions, such as cross country, rugby, football, cricket, hockey and netball. All of this encourages pupils to engage in a healthy lifestyle.

You have invested in the professional development of your teachers and teaching assistants. School leaders and subject specialists from within Aston Community Education Trust have worked with staff to improve their subject knowledge in reading, writing and mathematics. This has raised their expectations of what pupils should and can achieve.

Following the previous inspection, you were asked to improve the teaching of reading further so that pupils could develop the skills needed to analyse texts in greater depth. Teachers now actively develop pupils' inference skills. In addition, adults focus explicitly on extending pupils' vocabulary and support pupils to use grammar correctly in their writing. This has resulted in a larger proportion of pupils than previously reaching higher standards in both reading and writing.

You have used the expertise of your school leaders to develop mathematics teaching so that it has improved pupils' skills in mathematics. A structured approach to planning mathematics is addressing pupils' gaps in mathematical understanding. 'Challenge baskets' that contain tasks of increasing difficulty encourage pupils to learn more deeply in mathematics and enable them to apply their mathematical knowledge to problem-solving activities. In the past, pupils' progress in mathematics has lagged behind the progress they make in reading and writing by the end of Year 6. There are signs of improvement, showing that pupils' attainment in mathematics more closely matches that of reading and writing.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that the arrangements to safeguard pupils' welfare are fit for purpose. Safeguarding has a high profile across the school. All staff are well trained. They receive regular updates to their training and have frequent opportunities to discuss any safeguarding issues. They fully understand their responsibilities to report any safeguarding concerns and to whom they should be reported.

Safeguarding policies are appropriate, up to date and readily available on the school's website. The Aston Community Education Trust human resources officer is thorough in ensuring that all the required checks on staff and volunteers takes place. You made sure that the record of these checks kept in school was fully compliant by the end of the inspection by adding on the details of the checks that had been done on your own academy governors. Your records of the actions taken to support the most vulnerable pupils are also thorough.

Pupils learn about the importance of staying safe in the community, for example through the North Yorkshire police personal safety programme, Crucial Crew, where pupils work through a series of real-life scenarios, learning for example about road, fire and online safety.

The conversations I had with pupils and their responses to the Ofsted pupil survey indicated that they feel safe in school. Pupils told me that if they have any concerns they feel confident to talk to a member of staff.

Pupils told me that behaviour is good. They said that bullying occurs rarely. They said that, if bullying does happen, members of staff deal with it effectively. Staff and parents agree that children feel safe in school, behaviour is good and incidents of bullying are very rare.

Inspection findings

- Over the last three years, standards in reading, writing and mathematics have improved. In 2017, by the end of Year 6, the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading and mathematics rose to be in line with the national average. However, progress rates have fluctuated year on year in mathematics in particular. In 2016 and 2017, the progress pupils made in mathematics was below the national average.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics is improving, because you have introduced a whole-school approach to the teaching of mathematics. This provides teachers with a termly plan that ensures that the teaching of mathematics builds on what pupils have previously learned. Consequently, pupils increasingly apply their mathematical skills to reasoning and problem-solving activities.
- School assessment information of pupils' progress and attainment, together with scrutiny of the work in pupils' books, suggests that current pupils are on track to

improve upon the school's outcomes in 2017. Your robust checking of the progress made by pupils enables teachers and leaders to identify pupils who are at risk of underachievement. Effective action is taken to address any issues identified with appropriate support and interventions.

- As a result of the actions taken to address any underachievement with targeted support, the school's assessment information shows that the progress of girls and disadvantaged pupils has improved this year. The gap in the attainment reached between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally in all subjects is diminishing. However, you realise that there is still work to do to accelerate the rates of progress of disadvantaged pupils in all year groups to close gaps in attainment completely.
- Historically the proportion of pupils reaching the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6 has been lower than the national average. You have therefore focused on developing the skills of teachers to ensure that pupils are challenged in their learning. Work in pupils' books shows that pupils have opportunities to apply the skills they have been taught to improve their reading and writing and to deepen their mathematical understanding. Consequently, a greater proportion of pupils are now reaching the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- We agreed, as did other school leaders and governors, that pupils' work in their English and mathematics books is of a higher standard than their work in other subjects. You have recognised this and are reviewing and developing the subject content in a range of subjects. You have reviewed the approach to the teaching of literacy to ensure that pupils' writing skills are applied to any written work in other subjects. Opportunities for pupils to practise their mathematical skills in other subjects are also being developed. You are developing the assessment of pupils' attainment in a wider range of subjects, so that teachers can more effectively plan work that builds on what pupils know already.
- You agree that a common feature in pupils' books that we looked at during the inspection was that their work is sometimes marred by spelling inaccuracy and variable presentation and handwriting. Consequently, you have made improving pupils' presentation and spelling a main priority for development across the curriculum.
- Fixed-term exclusions have been above the national average over the last three years. You have therefore taken concerted and effective action to tackle challenging behaviour. The number of behaviour incidents and the frequency of fixed-term exclusions have declined markedly since 2016.
- You have continued to respond immediately to any absence in school by contacting parents and making home visits. Consequently, pupils' attendance has continued to improve. Pupils' absence rates have fallen and are now in line with the national average. The number of pupils who are regularly absent from school has also reduced.
- In 2017, you and the trust responded to the request from the local authority to create nursery provision on the school site to accommodate a rising number of nursery age children in the local community. Your nursery provision is providing children with an effective start to school. The learning environment is safe and

well resourced both indoors and outside. With the support of early years practitioners from the trust, teachers are developing their skills to teach early reading through phonics. For example, children outside were matching pictures of objects with the initial sounds and another group were blending sounds to make simple words. Children are making good progress from their starting points. You agree that there is work to do to develop the nursery provision further so that children make better progress in reading and writing.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils' presentation, including handwriting and spelling, particularly in mathematics and the foundation subjects
- teachers provide pupils with more opportunities to practise their writing and mathematics skills across the wider curriculum
- they develop the assessment of pupils' progress and attainment in the foundation subjects so that teachers can plan work that builds on pupils' prior knowledge and understanding in all subjects.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, 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 Rotherham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Turner

Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection I made a brief visit to the breakfast club. I also made brief visits to all Year 3 and 4 classes with you. Because Year 5 and 6 pupils were involved in activities, I scrutinised work in their books with the English and mathematics leaders. I also looked at work in pupils' books during visits to lessons. I met with four governors, including the chair of the governing body and the improvement leader for the Aston Community Education Trust. I had discussions with your inclusion manager, the trust educational welfare officer and the human resources officer.

I took account of the three free-text responses from Ofsted's parent survey Parent View. I also considered the seven responses to the Ofsted pupil survey and the 10 responses to the Ofsted staff survey. I met with five members of staff. I talked informally to pupils during lessons. I also met formally with pupils from Years 4, 5 and 6. I listened to two Year 3 pupils read. I met informally with parents at the

start of the school day to establish their views of the school.

I scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, assessment information, governors' minutes and attendance and safeguarding information and records.