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Mrs Wendy Figes  
Executive Headteacher  
Thornhill Primary School  
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Dear Mrs Figes

### **Short inspection of Thornhill Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 13 March 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 October 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. As the executive headteacher, you share your time equally between Thornhill and your partner primary school. You have maintained close relationships with parents and carers, even though all the teachers are new to post. The school continues to sit at the heart of the small village community. Pupils who leave the school make progress that is in line with the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. Their attainment is in line with the national average in reading, writing and mathematics.

Along with the governors, you have accurately identified strengths and areas for further development. Your evaluation of the school's effectiveness is astute. The school improvement plan plainly sets out how leaders plan to build upon improvements already achieved. Governors know the school well. They clearly articulate their understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further development. Governors proactively evaluate their own skills so that they can better challenge and hold you to account.

You have worked effectively to develop the life experiences and aspirations of the pupils in your care. Pupils not only learn about the values of British citizenship, they learn about the values of European and global citizenship. For example, pupils in key stage 1 have benefited from a twinning project with a school in London and another in the Republic of Ireland. Pupils have engaged in online calls with the other schools, letter writing and a collaborative arts project. They learn about life in

different places. In key stage 2, pupils spoke with enthusiasm about a joint project with a school in the Philippines. They engage in regular correspondence and learn what life is like for a child to grow up in another country. Teachers celebrate pupils' work well in colourful displays around the school. As a result of the broad and exciting curriculum on offer, pupils have a sound grasp of equality and differences. Pupils know that each person should be treated with mutual respect.

Parents hold the school in high regard. Those that I spoke to, and those that responded to the Ofsted surveys, said that you and the staff were supportive and approachable. Parents said that they have no concerns about the behaviour or safety of the pupils in your care.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They told me about the range of school trips and residential visits that enrich the curriculum. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about a recent residential trip to York and a past residential visit that focused on outdoor and adventurous activities. Pupils said that they get on well with one another. They said that incidents of bullying or name-calling were very rare. Pupils enjoy the wide range of exciting sports on offer. For example, archery, sword fencing and cricket. They enjoy engaging in competitive sports with other schools.

At the previous inspection, school leaders were asked to improve writing in key stage 1. Since then you have restructured how you teach writing. You found that completing one long piece of writing each week was becoming burdensome for the pupils and they were losing interest. As a result, you moved to teaching writing through more frequent writing tasks based on a range of curriculum topics. For example, pupils enjoyed writing about the eggs that hatched into chicks last week. From looking in pupils' books I could see that pupils write across a wide range of genres and apply their handwriting well. The most able pupils use increasingly sophisticated vocabulary and language; grammatical features are typically applied well. However, sometimes in mathematics pupils continue to spell subject-specific words incorrectly because they do not have the support in place to help them spell these words correctly.

School leaders were also asked to improve methods of communication with parents in relation to the progress their children make. Methods of communication with parents have changed considerably. Parents are kept well informed through newsletters and letters from the office. The school website is informative. Parents said that they benefit from termly assessment reports about the progress of their children, and in the summer term they receive a longer, more detailed report. In the early years, parents have daily access to the classroom, where they are kept informed about their children's learning. Parents are regularly invited into school to view their children's learning journals and are encouraged to contribute to them through their home-links books. Parents that I spoke to were appreciative of the regular text messages that are sent to remind them about school events.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

As the designated lead for safeguarding you have ensured that this work is given

the highest priority. You have made all of the relevant checks on the suitability of adults to work in the school. The chair of the governing body makes regular checks on the single central safeguarding record. You work with several agencies, including the contact and referral team and the police, to ensure that pupils remain safe. Staff have received training in basic awareness of safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty, to help them spot signs of potential radicalisation. You have received training to help you to be more alert to the potential signs of female genital mutilation. Records of your work to safeguard pupils are detailed. Staff are vigilant and aware of their responsibilities.

The curriculum provides pupils with many opportunities to deepen their understanding of how to stay safe. Pupils are taught how to stay safe while on the internet; they know not to share personal information. Due to the school's proximity to a river and the sea, you teach the pupils about staying safe near water. As a result, all pupils from Reception to Year 6 receive blocks of swimming lessons each year.

### **Inspection findings**

- During this inspection, I focused on three lines of enquiry. The first related to school attendance. School attendance was lower than the national average for the three years prior to 2017/2018. Through a range of effective measures, you were successful in raising school attendance to 96.6% last year. You have remained proactive in your pursuit of improvements. You have worked closely with the local authority attendance officer to challenge those who miss school the most. You quickly deal with issues that affect attendance and provide tailored support to families when needed. You continue to promote and celebrate attendance through regular newsletters and assemblies. Attendance for current pupils remains above the national average.
- The second area that I focused on related to the progress that pupils make in mathematics by the end of key stage 2. Since the previous inspection, you have changed the way you teach mathematics to focus on allowing pupils more time to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills. Pupils said that they enjoyed their mathematics lessons and found the work appropriately challenging. Current assessment data and the work in pupils' books indicate that pupils are making good progress. You, along with the teachers, make careful checks on the quality of work in pupils' books both with the partner school and within the local cluster of primary schools. However, despite these positive changes to the teaching of mathematics, the impact of your actions is not yet reflected in published outcomes.
- The final area that I looked at related to how well children achieve in the early years. The early years is a vibrant and exciting learning environment. A culture of good reading is promoted well through a print-rich environment. Children are immersed in high-quality texts. There are clear links between the teaching of phonics and reading and, as a result, children read well. The children have many opportunities to make marks and develop their fine motor skills. Children regularly practise writing the sounds they are currently learning. The needs of children are well met through effective staffing. Since the previous inspection you

have introduced provision for two-year-old children and those of Nursery age. You have taken this action because children were entering the Reception class with very low skills for their age. You are clear in your assertion that you can work with these children for longer periods of time, ensuring that they are better prepared for Reception. The efforts of your work are beginning to have a positive impact on the progress of current children. For example, the proportion of children who achieved a good level of development doubled in 2018 when compared to the previous year.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they provide pupils in key stage 1 with more support to help them spell mathematical vocabulary accurately
- they embed the positive changes to the teaching of mathematics and ensure higher outcomes for pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

John Donald  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection I met with you and the senior teacher. I met with four members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. Together, we visited the three classes and talked to pupils about their learning. In the classes we visited we looked at pupils' books from a range of subject areas.

I scrutinised a wide range of school documentation, including the self-evaluation and the school improvement plan. I examined the single central safeguarding record. I spoke to parents and grandparents at the start of the school day. I spoke to pupils informally at lunchtime. I considered the 16 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and the 11 free text responses. I considered the 11 responses to the pupils' survey and the 11 responses to the staff survey.