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Miss Shelley Walsh
Headteacher
Thorpedene Primary School
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Dear Miss Walsh

Short inspection of Thorpedene Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 27 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Pupils at Thorpedene are very proud of their school. Their behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. Pupils enjoy coming to school due to the exciting experiences and opportunities the school offers. Pupils speak with enthusiasm about the range of interesting subjects they learn. One pupil said, 'I really love coming to school as I love learning.' The broad, rich and lively curriculum has a positive impact on pupils' progress, ensuring that they learn well. Pupils feel valued and included in school life. They relish the leadership roles the school provides, such as being a digital leader, librarian or part of the school council.

Senior leaders know their school well and have clear priorities for areas that require further improvement. They have ensured that their enthusiasm and high expectations are shared by all. Their determination and high aspirations ensure that all pupils at Thorpedene are well prepared for the next stage in their education. Staff are proud members of the school and agree that the school is well led. They particularly value the importance you place on their well-being. Professional development has been used to encourage, challenge and support teacher's improvement. As a result, strong leadership has developed within the school.

Parents are very positive about the school and the majority of parents would recommend it to others. This is confirmed in Parent View, Ofsted's online

questionnaire. Typical comments include: 'Thorpedene has been an excellent choice for my daughter. She has absolutely flourished since she has been here,' and 'Their school motto of 'caring, achieving, respecting with confidence' is celebrated across the school.' One parent also stated, 'The teaching staff are incredible. They really do move mountains for our children.'

Since becoming part of Southend East Community Academy Trust in September 2016, the school has made effective use of the benefits this brings, along with the continued work with other local schools. For example, teachers have been able to share their good practice and complete shared checks on assessment across the schools, which has supported improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. Thorpedene has also led on projects, such as 'school readiness', which aims to ensure that children in the early years are well prepared to start school.

The governing body has a range of skills and expertise. Governors fulfil their responsibilities well and have a secure knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

The previous inspection identified that more opportunities were needed for pupils to use their literacy skills. Pupils books show that they produce a wide range of types of writing across other curriculum subjects. Additional areas to improve were pupils' progress in phonics and their accuracy in spelling. Due to the effective teaching in phonics and spelling, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check is typically above the national average. Furthermore, in 2018, pupils' attainment in spelling at the end of key stage 2 was in line with the national average.

Safeguarding is effective.

At Thorpedene, there is a very strong culture of keeping pupils safe. The school has a significant proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are supported through pupil premium funding. Some families face very challenging circumstances. As a result, leaders have afforded a dedicated inclusion team within school to support pupils and families. The team have relentlessly ensured that safeguarding is a priority of the school and all arrangements are fit for purpose.

Leaders have a secure oversight of safeguarding throughout the school. All staff undertake relevant training to ensure that they take responsibility for keeping pupils safe. This communication and training ensures that all staff are up to date with legal requirements and, as a result, pupils at Thorpedene are well looked after.

School safeguarding records are detailed and maintained well. Leaders persistently follow up concerns in a timely way and involve external agencies to provide appropriate advice and support. Parents appreciate the support, care and guidance that the team provide for their families. Parents report that staff 'go above and beyond their duty of care' and their 'dedication towards maintaining a nurturing and welcoming environment for all pupils is something they should be extremely proud of'.

Pupils spoke highly of how they are cared for by all staff and of how they feel safe and well looked after.

Inspection findings

- To confirm that the school remains good, one of my lines of enquiry was about pupils' outcomes in key stage 1. This was because in 2018, pupils' attainment in reading, writing, mathematics and science was below the national average.
- Leaders have made improvements to the teaching and learning of reading, writing, mathematics and science, for example, through training and mentoring staff. Documents to support teaching and learning, have also been reviewed to assist teachers in their planning for learning. Pupils in key stage 1 are making better progress this year. Leaders use information about pupils' learning astutely to make sure that additional support is provided, when needed, to ensure that pupils achieve well.
- My second line of enquiry was about pupils' achievement in reading at key stage 2 because, although improving, pupils have made less progress in reading compared to writing and mathematics in recent years.
- The profile of reading has risen significantly in the school. Reading is woven throughout the curriculum. The school library is an exciting place with a range of books chosen to engage readers. It is well used by pupils and parents and has been pivotal in promoting the love of reading. Pupils read widely and often and say they 'love library time'. Pupils benefit from the enthusiasm of staff, who read to them often, author and storyteller visits, reading challenges and parental workshops, as well as projects, such as encouraging male family members to come in and read.
- Leaders have introduced a reading programme and resources that develop pupils' fluency and comprehension skills. Pupils enjoy the programme because they choose their own books, which are well matched to their abilities so that they know they are making progress as they move through the grades of difficulty. One pupil said, 'Everyone reads, and everyone enjoys it.' These aspects have contributed towards pupils' achievement in reading improving at the end of key stage 2, and reading is now a strength of the school.
- My third line of enquiry focused on how effectively leaders have improved outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Although improving, disadvantaged pupils across the school achieved less well than other pupils nationally in 2018.
- Leaders have a good understanding of the barriers to learning that disadvantaged pupils face. Planned support is then well-matched to enable disadvantaged pupils to catch up quickly, including training for staff, additional teaching and mentors to help pupils in need of emotional support. Current disadvantaged pupils are making good progress, often from low starting points.
- My final line of enquiry was to evaluate how effectively leaders have improved attendance, which dipped to below average in 2018, and to find out if they had addressed the increasing number of fixed-period exclusions.

- Your rigorous monitoring procedures have enabled you to identify the issues which prevent some pupils from attending school regularly. You have high expectations for attendance. You work closely with parents to ensure that they are aware of the importance of regular attendance. Regular meetings involving leaders, learning mentors, the local authority attendance team, and the trust keep everyone informed of pupils' individual family circumstances. Pupils understand that attending school is important, and they know the school target. They relish the celebration awards for good attendance as individuals or as a class and have recently designed posters about the importance of coming to school. Even so, current attendance rates are slightly lower compared to this time last year.
- Due to a consistent approach to behaviour management and well-planned support for the small number of pupils identified with challenging behaviour, the number of fixed-period exclusions has decreased considerably.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvements in teaching continue in key stage 1 so that a higher proportion of pupils attain the expected standards, particularly in writing
- differences continue to diminish between disadvantaged pupils' attainment and other pupils nationally
- they continue to work with the minority of parents whose children miss school regularly so that parents understand the link between exemplary attendance and academic achievement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the trust's chief executive officer (CEO), the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Southend-on-Sea. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Welch
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and the two deputy headteachers to discuss progress since the previous inspection, and to agree the key lines of enquiry. I also met with the CEO and trustees and a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body. I spoke to the leaders of phonics, English, mathematics and science and the leader with responsibility for disadvantaged pupils. I also spoke to pupils from the school

council and listened to pupils read from Year 2 and Year 6. I scrutinised a variety of sources of information, including your self-evaluation, plans for improvement, and assessment information. I examined the school's safeguarding procedures, child protection documentation and procedures and information about pupils' behaviour and attendance. We visited classrooms and looked at books. I also looked at 37 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, 40 responses to the online pupils' survey and 50 staff survey responses.