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Ms Verity Kenyon
Headteacher
Thurleigh Lower School
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Dear Ms Kenyon

Short inspection of Thurleigh Lower School

Following my visit to the school on 9 February 2016, 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 June 2011.

This school continues to be good.

You have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have ensured that there is a positive, productive culture and ethos in the school where children and pupils can flourish.

Pupils' well-being is at the heart of your work. This has helped to establish and maintain a friendly and caring school. All staff give a high priority to providing pupils with skills that enhance their emotional well-being, so that they can learn well from the minute they begin their school day. Pupils understand how their emotions affect their ability to learn, and are given effective strategies to help them. In the words of one pupil, 'the skills help us learn better'.

Pupils are happy and confident. They support each other well both inside and outside the classroom, which generates a friendly atmosphere around the school. Good friendships and enjoyment are very much features of lunchtimes and playtimes. Almost all parents are fully supportive of the ethos and values of the school. They appreciate the many opportunities that you and your staff give to their children in this small school.

Teaching is strong. Staff are very proud to work at Thurleigh. They are well trained and supportive of the ethos and values of the school, working well together as a team. You and your teachers have carefully crafted the curriculum, so that it challenges and enthuses the pupils in the mixed-age classes in your school. As a

result, from their individual starting points, the proportion that make good progress in their learning has been sustained since the last inspection. Most pupils leave Thurleigh achieving as well as other pupils nationally and some even better.

At the last inspection, you were asked to extend the tracking of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding across the curriculum. This you have carried out effectively. More recently, you have implemented a new assessment system that robustly tracks the progress of all pupils, taking account of the national changes to assessment. You and your staff check the progress of pupils regularly to ensure that all of them remain on track to meet your high expectations for their achievement. You recognise that ensuring that this system links to other subjects remains a priority.

You creatively use the skills of the support staff to enhance pupils' understanding. The support you offer for pupils who have special educational needs or disability is very much a strength. The staff who often provide one-to-one lessons are well trained and skilful at helping individuals or small groups make the progress of which they are capable. Parents commented on how well you make sure that every child is well cared for and given a chance to shine, both academically and personally.

More recently, your governors have taken responsibility for the pre-school that has operated in your building for many years. Right from the start, provision for the two-year-olds has been caring and appropriate for their individual needs, and in line with the ethos for the whole school. Your vision and creative plans for the learning for these youngest pupils ensure that they start their educational experience well.

Teaching in the early years provision is very strong. Children are confident and happy. They are given every opportunity to practise their reading, writing and number skills in a creative and stimulating environment. As a result, the proportion of children in 2015 who left the early years provision achieving a good level of development was above the national average. This is set to continue.

The decision has been taken to expand the school to take pupils in Years 5 and 6, starting in 2017. While governors are rightly preparing for changes to the school building, they are skilfully making sure that the standard of education provided for the pupils currently in the school continues to be a very high priority.

Safeguarding is effective.

Your systems for checking on all aspects of safeguarding are robust. It is clear from parents that you go beyond expectations to support pupils and families. Pupils say that they feel safe and that if they have worries or concerns, they know whom to go to for help. Most parents and carers agree that the school keeps pupils safe and secure. Through your work on developing emotional well-being, pupils are learning to identify how to keep themselves safe.

You have provided regular and frequent training to ensure that staff understand how to identify and report concerns effectively. The school's records indicate that

any issues are followed up promptly and extensively. The single central record is maintained thoroughly.

Displays around the school show the importance you place on teaching pupils about anti-bullying and keeping safe when using a range of technology. Pupils are knowledgeable about how to keep safe when online.

Since the last inspection, you have ensured that attendance has improved and any absence is followed up quickly.

Inspection findings

- At the time of the last inspection, inspectors praised many aspects of the school's work. They recognised the effective and creatively planned curriculum, together with the highly effective care and support given to pupils. Inspectors highlighted a couple of areas for improvement, which you have taken appropriate action to tackle. Your actions to implement your chosen assessment approach and tracking of pupils' progress continue to have a positive impact in moving the school forward. Pupils are more adept at assessing the quality of their own work.
- You and governors have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Self-evaluation is accurate. The governors are supportive of the school's work and share your aspiration to improve the standard of education for the pupils at Thurleigh. The governors assist you by overseeing the management of teachers' performance with rigour. You are aware that at times they do not question sufficiently deeply about the progress children are making across the school. This is an area of governance you are improving.
- Teaching engages pupils' interests well and provokes enjoyment for the mixed ages in classes. To enhance their topic work on subjects such as planes, trains and automobiles, the older pupils have experienced trips to places including Duxford Museum. In school, learning is equally enhanced by their opportunities to be 'reporters' and to apply technology skills by filming each other in role. This helps pupils deepen their thinking and apply their skills of writing easily and effectively in other subject areas.
- Across all year groups, pupils are making strong progress from their individual starting points. You have already implemented a new and robust system of assessment. You and your teachers regularly check on the progress of pupils and use the information gained to plan lessons that ensure their individual needs are further met.
- The numbers of disadvantaged pupils are low. The gaps between their achievement and that of other pupils in the school are closing. In 2015, disadvantaged pupils achieved as well as other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. This is because you use the small amounts of funding received thoughtfully, so that these pupils receive additional support to achieve as well as they can in the lower school. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

- The way you plan and organise the curriculum is a strength and ensures that pupils are able to develop their skills in reading on a daily basis. Teachers thoughtfully plan the start of the day so that pupils gain a love of reading, together with skills of comprehension, spelling and grammar. Pupils enjoy reading. They freely explain the types of books they prefer to read and challenge themselves to progress quickly through the reading levels used by the school. Reading is a strength of the school.
- The small number of children that enter Reception do so with skills and abilities that vary year on year. Adults are highly effective at using assessment information to plan learning that helps each child achieve their very best. Learning journeys illustrate that children learn in a rich and stimulating environment. The children can cheerfully and confidently explain their learning. In one lesson, the teacher encouraged the children to count while the star pupil of the day carried out their duties. The children confidently counted and relished using the larger numbers up to 50.
- Your expectation that pupils respond to the feedback given to them is not always consistently met. The feedback given can be too general to enable pupils to learn from their mistakes, or to help the most-able pupils to extend and master further skills.
- You are aware that at times, the most-able pupils are not sufficiently challenged with tasks that make them think even harder. In Key Stage 1, teachers' planning for learning in mathematics does not always include enough opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their mastery of the skills they are developing. This results in fewer of them achieving above the national expectations for their age.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide precise feedback so that pupils, especially the most able, know how to improve their work
- teachers give time for pupils to edit and redraft their work, using the comments from feedback to deepen their learning even further
- teachers demand even more of the most-able pupils, challenging them to think hard and grapple with open-ended tasks, especially in mathematics
- governors ask more challenging questions of school leaders to hold them more fully to account for the academic progress of 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 Bedford Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, teachers and governors. I visited all the classes and spoke with pupils and staff, as well as looking at pupils' work in books and on display. I observed pupils at breakfast club and after-school clubs and also at lunchtime and playtime. I looked at the school's approach to gathering assessment information and the progress that pupils are currently making. Safeguarding records and information relating to attendance were considered. The views of parents were evaluated from the responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. Staff and pupil views were also analysed following their completion of an online questionnaire.