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Paulette Houghton
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Dear Mrs Houghton

Short inspection of Thorpe Hall Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 20 June 2017, 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 November 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

The school has faced a number of challenges over the last three academic years. However, you have worked extremely well with other leaders and governors to preserve and improve the school's reputation. The expansion of the school, including managing the new building programme, led to a decline in standards and pupils' behaviour in 2015. You realised that there was insufficient focus on pupils' progress and quickly requested and received additional support. Pupils' attainment and progress improved in 2016. The school's own information about pupils' achievement shows an improving trend in pupils' progress this academic year.

The strong team of senior leaders and a smaller but strategic governing body have transformed the school. You have all worked effectively with staff, parents and the Opossum Federation to create a caring and strong sense of community at the school. Leaders and governors have consulted parents about the benefits of whether to join the Opossum Federation. The school is engaged in ongoing discussions and you intend to leave the school at the end of the current academic year. In our discussion at the start of the inspection, we agreed that I would include, as a key line of enquiry, the capacity of the current leaders to sustain improvements.

Such is your passion and commitment for the school that you delayed your

retirement date to work with other leaders to secure the school's plans. You have considered succession planning very carefully. As a result, you have worked closely with senior and middle leaders to develop new and more effective procedures. New ways of working include using information on pupils' behaviour and progress more strategically, and clarifying roles and responsibilities. In addition, you have provided effective support for staff and improved lines of accountability for pupils' achievements at all levels. Pupils are very happy with their school; they are ambitious and enjoy their responsibilities. Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, confirms that most parents are supportive and happy with the school's work to help their children achieve well. The most able pupils have a thirst to achieve high standards and receive sufficiently demanding work that challenges them well in all subjects.

Safeguarding is effective.

Senior leaders and governors fulfil their statutory duty well to ensure that pupils are safe at the school. Parents believe their children are kept safe; as one parent explained, 'The welfare of the children and the community is of the utmost importance at Thorpe Hall.'

The school uses early help extensively to support vulnerable pupils and their families. Strong partnership work with external agencies ensures that pupils receive timely support that prevents concerns being referred to social care. All staff have a clear understanding of what to do if they have concerns about pupils' safety. In turn, pupils are confident that they can turn to their teachers and other key staff, such as the parent adviser, if they have worries. Pupils say that they are safe in their school. They appreciate the e-safety week leaders' briefings about staying safe before they begin each holiday.

Training is up to date and the strong culture of safeguarding ensures that senior leaders have a very good understanding of local contextual and national issues. For example, they have covered work on the 'Prevent' duty and female genital mutilation. The school works closely with parents by using workshops to increase their awareness of how best to protect their children. The large majority of parents say that their children are happy and safe at the school.

Inspection findings

- To confirm that the school remains good, we agreed five lines of enquiry. All showed that you and other leaders have taken effective action to maintain the good quality of education at the school.
- We first considered the attendance and persistent absence of groups of pupils whose attendance was low. Persistent absence, previously above the national average for primary school, is now in line with the national average.
- Leaders have not hesitated to take robust action to pursue parents who do not ensure that their children attend school regularly. This includes, for example, taking legal action, and checking the validity of requests for absence. Case studies show that the school is diligent about following up absences and works

closely with a range of partners. Consequently, attendance is now above average.

- The second line of enquiry focused on pupils' behaviour, primarily as there was concern about the behaviour and safety of pupils at the school. The monitoring inspection in March 2015 found that leaders had not taken effective action to maintain the high standards of behaviour identified at the previous inspection.
- Following the monitoring inspection, leaders and governors introduced a raft of changes. Governors have moved swiftly to use the review of their work to set out a strategic plan for holding leaders to account for the school's effectiveness. Consequently, they are uncompromising when holding staff to account for pupils' attendance, behaviour and safety. In turn, leaders now demand more from teachers in relation to them taking full responsibility for classroom management.
- Leaders have revised the behaviour policy. They review and monitor its effectiveness regularly so that they can check whether leaders' actions have supported pupils to improve their behaviour. The reward system and all actions taken have led to pupils demonstrating good self-discipline.
- Low-level disruption is no longer prevalent and pupils say that teaching is rarely disrupted. The very few pupils who misbehave receive specialist support. Where necessary, the school makes very good use of external support, such as the local pupil referral unit and behaviour support team.
- The school is a calm place and I am satisfied that the school has effective methods that lead to good and improving classroom management and behaviour.
- The third line of enquiry looked at pupils' rates of progress in reading, primarily because in 2016, key stage 2 pupils made slower progress in reading.
- Leaders' analysis of the 2016 Year 6 reading tests identified that pupils were not sharp enough to 'read between the lines', identify different layers, and make inferences. Leaders have taken decisive action to develop pupils' reading habits. Pupils across the school read a wide range of challenging texts that demand more stamina and frequency of reading. All key stage 2 year groups read sections of a Shakespearean play. This enables pupils to gain a wider understanding and appreciation of a writer's use of language to make deduction. Inspection evidence confirms that reading has a high profile and there is emphasis on pupils developing skills of deduction and inference when reading both literary and non-literary texts. As a result, the school's own assessment information shows that pupils make good progress in reading.
- My fourth line of enquiry considered the progress of the most able pupils. Not all of the most able pupils, particularly the disadvantaged pupils and boys, achieved high standards in reading, writing and mathematics last year.
- The school development plan focuses on pupils' performance. Training for staff has considered providing more challenge for the most able pupils and ensuring that disadvantaged pupils achieve a high standard. Leaders have taken effective action to provide the most able pupils with a range of successful challenges to enable them to make faster progress. The school's information indicates that the most able pupils have made better progress this academic year. Nevertheless, leaders recognise that the most able pupils are not easily satisfied.
- My final line of enquiry considered the leadership and management skills of the

acting designated leaders to move the school forward. Inspection evidence found that the care and attention given to handing over roles and responsibilities to the interim new leaders has worked very well. The senior leaders responsible for assessment have worked effectively with other senior leaders to develop and implement new assessment procedures and increase levels of accountability. The changes outlined in this report have increased the leaders' capacity to sustain improvement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils and boys, are suitably challenged across the curriculum to satisfy their aspiration to achieve high standards
- changes made are sustained over time in this good and improving school.

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

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, I held a number of meetings with you and other senior leaders. You and other senior leaders accompanied me on a series of short visits to lessons across the school. I held discussions with different leaders, including the executive headteacher of Opossum Federation. Each meeting focused on each the five key lines of enquiry. These covered safeguarding, pupils' attendance, reading, the progress of the most able pupils and the capacity of designated leaders to sustain improvement. Meetings were held with the four governors, including the chair. A telephone message was received from the school improvement partner. I also met two groups of pupils and spoke with a minority of them during my visits to lessons and at social times. I worked with senior leaders to review the assessment information on pupils' progress and the records of pupils' attendance behaviour. I looked at a range of documentation. This included the school's self-evaluation and summary improvement plan, a review of the school's work, minutes of governors' meetings, records of pupils' progress and behaviour, evidence of records to keep pupils safe and their attendance. I also took into consideration the 59 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey for parents.