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Mrs K Stamp
Thornhill Primary School
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Dear Mrs Stamp

Short inspection of Thornhill Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 July 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 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

Your values of 'working together to be the best that we can be' are carefully embedded throughout school life. You and your effective leadership team are ambitious to drive further improvements and secure the best outcomes for pupils. Day-to-day management of the school is efficient because you ensure that staff have well-defined roles and responsibilities. The school is very inclusive. Those who attend the local special school take part in a range of school activities, such as drama productions.

Most parents are very supportive of the school. Almost all said that their child makes good progress. Parents were very impressed with the quality of teaching when they visited lessons during your 'open week'. Typical comments include: 'I really appreciate the level of commitment from staff to ensure that my child reaches his full potential. Teachers care a lot about the progress of every child and provide many interesting learning experiences.'

Your school is effective in supporting other schools as a national support school and in the Portswood Teaching School Alliance. In your role as a national leader of education, you have demonstrated your commitment to improving standards, such as ensuring that disadvantaged pupils do well both in this school and in the schools that you support.

An area for improvement identified at the last inspection was to raise achievement in key stage 1, particularly pupils' early reading and mathematical skills. In 2016, pupils completing Year 2 made good progress from their below-average starting points. Overall, they attained similarly to the national average.

Another area identified at the previous inspection was to provide pupils with more opportunities to develop their independence. This has now been successfully addressed and pupils develop both their personal responsibility and independence effectively. For example, pupils are encouraged to take on roles such as playtime buddies, class ambassadors or school councillors.

The leadership team recognise that the attendance of some pupils still needs to improve. Leaders also acknowledge that most-able pupils do not achieve as well as they could, particularly in mathematics and writing.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is a high priority in the school. Leaders have ensured that staff are well trained in recognising the risks that may affect pupils. Staff take their responsibilities extremely seriously. They act quickly if they have any concerns. Leaders, including designated leads for child protection, have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality.

Staff ensure that pupils know how to stay safe when using the internet. They teach them not to divulge personal information to strangers. Teachers have frank discussions with pupils regarding issues such as online bullying. Pupils said that there are no bullying issues in school but they know that staff would quickly step in to help if they ever had any concerns. The work of the family liaison adviser is valued by parents and pupils. They praised the support she provides regarding improving pupils' emotional well-being.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, we agreed to look at the impact of leaders' actions on the school's effectiveness. Since the previous inspection, you and your team have introduced many significant improvements. These include more careful monitoring of the quality of teaching and the progress that pupils make. Staff appreciate the numerous opportunities that they have been given to improve their skills and to continue their professional development with additional training.
- You and your team are resolutely focused on ensuring that disadvantaged pupils make strong progress. You use additional funding effectively to ensure that any pupil not making the progress you expect is provided with additional support to help them succeed. In 2016, many made significantly better progress than other pupils nationally in reading and mathematics.
- Those with governance responsibilities fulfil their roles diligently. They have a good understanding of pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. They are

highly experienced in areas such as safeguarding and education. Consequently, they are able to provide valuable support and challenge to leaders.

- An area of focus during my visit was the 2016 published attendance and persistent absence data. It indicates that the school's attendance is not yet in line with the national average for primary schools. Despite implementing a variety of strategies, there has been only a limited impact, and attendance levels are only improving slowly. You and your team have already identified that improving attendance by closer working with some parents is a key priority for the school in the future.
- Children typically start in the early years with lower skills and abilities than expected. They get off to a strong start and make good progress throughout their time in Reception. The percentage of pupils reaching a good level of development has been improving steadily each year and is now similar to the national average.
- In phonics, effective teaching ensures that pupils are making good progress in their development of early reading skills. Staff carefully support pupils to sound out new or difficult words. Although still a little below average, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check is improving year on year. Effective teaching has ensured that by Year 2 most pupils have caught up to the expected standard.
- We agreed to check the amount of progress that pupils make from their starting points. Typically, pupils make good progress in all year groups. Published information for 2016 indicates that most pupils in Year 6 last year made strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics. It is clear that in reading all groups of pupils continue to make strong progress. This is because staff instil a real love of books. Pupils said that books give them exciting experiences. Typical comments include: 'Reading makes you feel as if you are on the adventure yourself.'
- You recognise that you need to focus more on those pupils who are the most able in your school. Their rates of progress are not always strong enough in mathematics and in writing in key stage 2, because there are not enough planned opportunities to help these pupils to work at greater depth.
- We agreed to check on how effectively the curriculum gives pupils a varied range of opportunities. It is clear that you and your staff have worked hard to provide pupils with interesting learning experiences. One example of this was the Spanish themed week that took place earlier this year, when pupils had the opportunity to investigate the food, music, dance and language of Spain. Pupils' personal development is promoted effectively through the residential trips that you arrange. Extra-curricular opportunities are varied and cater for pupils' sporting, artistic and musical interests.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers plan work that enables the most able pupils to work at greater depth in

mathematics and writing in key stage 2

- rates of absence are reduced further by working more closely with hard-to-reach parents.

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

Yours sincerely

Liz Bowes
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, members of your senior leadership team and governors, including the chair of governors. A telephone conversation was held with a representative from the local authority. Discussions were also held with pupils. I also spoke to parents and pupils at the start of the school day. Together, we visited classes and looked in pupils' books. Views expressed by 33 parents, 35 staff and 113 pupils who responded to the Ofsted online surveys were also considered. A range of school documentation was checked, including: leaders' evaluation of the school's performance and plans for improvement; assessment, behaviour and exclusions information; the single central record of pre-employment checks; policies and procedures; and minutes of governors' meetings.