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Mrs Lynsey J Holzer
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Holzer

Short inspection of Poplars Community Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 July 2017 with Lindsay Hanger, Ofsted Inspector, 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 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

Children and pupils at Poplars Community Primary School are welcoming, enthusiastic and articulate. Most were positive about their school experience when talking to inspectors, and said that learning is made 'fun' by teachers, who really care about them. Most pupils are very keen, behave very well during their lessons and learn effectively. Achievement has continued to rise since the previous inspection. The progress that pupils make over time is good, as reflected by published information and by the school's most recent set of results for 2017, most notably in mathematics and writing.

There have been some significant challenges in behaviour since the previous inspection, most notably in the last year. The impact of the behaviour of a small number of pupils, who have very complex ongoing needs and vulnerabilities, is a real challenge for you. Many of these pupils arrive mid-way through the year. School information and inspection evidence confirms that your effective care of pupils' welfare and the attention that your staff pay to pupils' needs ensure that most of these pupils, over time, make good progress in both their learning and personal development. However, you have identified that there is still much work to do to ensure that you have the resources and the staffing expertise you need to manage the most challenging behaviour and to make sure that pupils have the most effective support they need.

You, the staff team and governors know the school well. You do not underestimate or shy away from the significant challenges that you continue to face. You have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the provision, and have a strong capacity to continue to improve both achievement and behaviour. Most importantly, you do not give up on children and pupils in your care, constantly reviewing and introducing new ways to support them.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that the correct checks are made when staff are recruited, and fully follow safer recruitment protocols. Staff are trained well in identifying concerns about pupils' safety and refer concerns to leaders appropriately. This includes training in the 'Prevent' duty, to support pupils who are vulnerable to extremism or radicalisation.

The designated safeguarding leader, with the deputy leader, maintains high-quality records of referrals and the actions taken by the school to protect vulnerable pupils. There are a significant number of pupils who require additional support. Leaders are tenacious in monitoring these pupils and challenge external agencies when they feel that children need more support than is being offered. They have made a real difference to the welfare, well-being and safety of a large number of pupils through their vigilance and determination.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was around behaviour and bullying in the school. This is because concerns were raised with Ofsted about this element of the school's work. Equally, Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, does not reflect a positive picture about the school. A number of parents have significant concerns most notably about pupils' behaviour, bullying and how well leaders communicate with parents.
- Inspection evidence confirms that some of these parental concerns and frustrations are valid, especially those about the impact of the behaviour of a small number of pupils, many of whom have very complex social and emotional needs.
- You and your team have worked tirelessly to address these issues through more focused staff training and improved personalised support for pupils, including developing pupils' understanding of consequences of their actions. Evidence from inspection indicates that this calm and thoughtful approach to behaviour is now starting to make a difference to the most challenging pupils' behaviour. The number of incidents of poor behaviour, most notably in this summer term, has reduced significantly.
- You know that there is still much work left to do to make sure that all pupils, particularly those who have the most challenging needs and the significant number who enter the school mid-way through the year, have the support they need to be able to behave as you expect. You have an appropriate action plan to

continue to develop this next year.

- To address the severe lack of available alternative and specialist provision in the locality, especially for pupils who have complex needs, you have begun to create your own 'hub' provision. You know that this provision is not yet matching the significant needs of pupils because you do not have the additional resources and expertise necessary. You are working with a number of local pupil referral units and specialist support to continue to improve this provision in the next academic year.
- Almost all pupils who spoke to inspectors were very complimentary about the school, saying that there were sometimes issues with behaviour but that these had reduced considerably during the year because of the actions you have taken. During the inspection, behaviour around the school was calm and orderly, and any issues were dealt with quickly and calmly.
- Owing to the negative commentary on Parent View, inspectors spoke to a number of parents throughout the day of the inspection. Almost all parents spoken to were effusive in their praise for the school. Equally, a number of parents visited the school and requested to speak to inspectors to highlight their praise for the particular support that leaders and staff had given to their children.
- Some pupils arrive at the school with a lack of understanding about appropriate behaviour. There is clear evidence that the school takes action where concerns are identified, and bullying incidents have reduced over the course of the year.
- Pupils who spoke to inspectors did not agree with the more negative parental perceptions about bullying. Pupils, both in lessons and formally, told inspectors that, while bullying does happen, it is dealt with well by staff. Pupils said that it was easy to make friends and that it is safe to be different in their school.
- My second line of enquiry was around how leaders are ensuring that children achieve well in the early years, especially disadvantaged children. This is because, although published information shows an improvement in outcomes in the early years, so that in 2016 it was in line with the national average, disadvantaged children did not appear to achieve as well as other children nationally.
- Inspection evidence confirms that a significant number of pupils enter the early years with standards well below those that are typical for their age. The early years team identifies gaps in children's learning quickly and provides high-quality indoor and outdoor activities that engage children rapidly.
- The leader pays particular attention to disadvantaged boys. For example, the team's 'superhero' theme was used purposefully to engage boys in writing and reading more effectively. As a result, children are making good progress in the early years from their varied starting points. When these children do not reach a level of good learning development, the transition into Year 1 is very thorough and continues to support them to catch up.
- My third line of enquiry was to review how leaders are securing better attainment in mathematics by the end of key stage 2. This is because, although progress was strong in 2016 in writing and reading, the progress in mathematics for some

groups of pupils was below the national average.

- Increased staff training, a specific focus on 'maths mastery' and a whole-school push to raise standards in mathematics have led to a remarkable increase in the numbers of pupils achieving the expected standard in mathematics in 2017. These pupils have made good progress from their starting points.
- My fourth line of enquiry was to look at the continued support for some pupils in Year 3, including the disadvantaged pupils, who did not attain the expected standards in Reception or in the Year 1 phonics check. Once again, it is evident that teachers know pupils very well and adapt their support according to the needs of the pupils in their care. Consequently, these pupils are learning well and are either at or working closely towards age-related expectations.
- My final line of enquiry was to look at attendance. This is because attendance was an area for improvement identified in the previous inspection.
- You have worked hard over the last three years to raise attendance, and there have been incremental rises in both the whole-school attendance and the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. The absence of an attendance officer in the autumn 2016 impacted on this work and attendance started to dip. Your new attendance officer has quickly picked up again on the strategies to improve attendance, and the summer attendance figures show a considerable improvement in the reduction of both absence and persistent absence for pupils. However, attendance is likely to remain below the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to work with the local authority to develop their 'hub' provision and their chosen behaviour strategies so that staff and pupils use them more effectively to further reduce challenging behaviour
- the headteacher, senior leaders and staff work with parents to improve relationships and communication, especially when parents have concerns about behaviour, bullying and the reasons for leaders' decisions
- they continue to improve attendance so that it is in line with the national average, including that of key groups 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 Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kim Pigram
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you, leaders and four members of the governing body, including the interim chair. We also met with representatives from the local authority. We visited classrooms and undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work while we were in some of those lessons. We spoke with pupils throughout the day and met with pupils formally. We also met with leaders from the early years and the leader for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

We took account of the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire from 81 parents, as well as 13 staff responses. We looked at the school's own surveys of parents and carers and pupils. We also spoke in the morning with a number of parents who were arriving at the school with their children. In addition, we met with a number of parents who arrived at the school at the end of the day wishing to speak to inspectors. We reviewed a range of school documentation, including information related to safeguarding, bullying, attendance and pupils' progress.