

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Miss Emma Dawson
Thundersley Primary School
Hart Road
Thundersley
Benfleet
Essex
SS7 3PT

Dear Miss Dawson

Short inspection of Thundersley Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 4 October 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 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. You and your staff provide a warm and caring learning environment which enables the pupils to enjoy their education and achieve well. Staff and parents are overwhelmingly supportive of your leadership. Typical parent views include: 'excellent school with the best qualities a school can offer' and 'A well led school offering lots of extra-curricular activities and parent involvement events.'

At the previous inspection you were asked to strengthen your links with local pre-schools. You have successfully achieved this. Closer liaison with the pre-school and stronger transition arrangements have led to children quickly settling into Reception. They have positive attitudes towards learning and feel secure; for example, I observed children in Reception talking about their feelings during circle time. Staff plan activities that are well matched to the needs and interests of the children. As a result, the number of children leaving Reception with a good level of development is above average.

You draw well on the support provided by the Robus multi-academy trust. Joint training across the trust schools has helped to improve teaching. Teachers from across the trust also share how they mark and grade pupils' work. As a result, teachers' judgements about how well pupils are achieving standardised marking are more accurate.

Raising pupils' aspirations of what they can achieve is one of your key priorities. You, your staff and governors are highly ambitious for the pupils and aim for each child to achieve their best. Pupils are developing into resilient learners because they persevere when attempting challenging work. This is exemplified by the pupil who commented 'I like art but I can't draw', with his friend correcting him by saying, 'You mean you can't draw yet.'

Pupils follow a broad and balanced curriculum. Subjects such as history, art and science are taught through carefully planned topics. Pupils thoroughly enjoy the 'wow' events at the start of each topic. For example, at the start of their work on the Stone Age, Year 3 pupils learned how to build fires using twigs. Pupils also appreciate the trips and visits that are linked to their learning. During my visit, Year 5 pupils were on a residential trip at an outdoor centre. The number of pupils participating in after-school clubs and activities is high. The curriculum makes a valuable contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Behaviour is good around the school and in lessons, and pupils also think this is the case. Lessons are rarely disrupted. Pupils are polite and courteous to adults and one another. Parents and staff agree that behaviour is good. Older pupils benefit from the opportunities to take on roles of responsibility such as school prefect and play leader.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is a high priority in the school. The identity of all visitors to the school is checked and they are provided with safeguarding information. Before appointment, the school carries out checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children. Staff are trained annually in safeguarding according to the latest guidance and kept up to date throughout the year. Staff follow school procedures if they have any concerns about a pupil's well-being. All concerns are meticulously followed up and records are of a high quality and kept securely. Pupils who are looked after by the local authority are very well supported and as a result they thrive academically and socially.

Incidents of bullying are rare and pupils are confident that should bullying occur adults will deal with it effectively. Pupils can also report concerns to the anti-bullying champions or through an online system. Pupils are taught how to keep safe online and parents are provided with up-to-date information through workshops and the school website.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain whether the school remained good I looked at three lines of enquiry. The first was the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The attendance for these groups of pupils has been well below average. A higher-than-average number of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are persistently absent from school. You have correctly identified attendance as a key area for improvement.

- I looked at the approaches you take to monitor attendance and found that staff are meticulous in following up reasons for pupils' absence. You carefully track absences and if a pupil's absence is in danger of falling below average you quickly invite parents into school for a discussion. For most pupils this action is successful in improving their attendance.
- You run attendance workshops for parents and work with outside agencies. Evidence shows that attendance of disadvantaged pupils is starting to improve, but there is still more to do. There is still a small minority of parents who are not responding to your efforts.
- My second line of enquiry concerned whether teachers pitched the work they set pupils at the right level, especially for middle-ability pupils and the most able pupils in key stage 2. The proportion of pupils leaving the end of key stage 2 with the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was above average in 2017. However, the progress of middle-ability pupils was below average in reading and mathematics. The progress of the most able pupils was below average in writing and mathematics. This is preventing more pupils attaining greater depth in these subjects.
- Evidence in pupils' books shows that many teachers are planning a series of challenges to extend pupils' learning well. I saw some excellent examples of writing by the most able pupils in Year 1. Pupils were able to write legible sentences using capital letters and full stops correctly. They were challenged to write paragraphs. I also saw some good examples of middle-ability pupils being challenged to develop their writing skills and extend their vocabulary in a number of key stage 2 books.
- In mathematics books, there was often good evidence of middle-ability pupils and the most able being quickly moved on to the more challenging calculations and problem-solving activities. Pupils told me that once you have shown you can easily solve maths problems some teachers move you on to the harder work. I saw evidence of this in a number of books. However, it is evident that there is some good practice in the school but the level of challenge seen was not consistent. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and lower-ability pupils are well supported in their learning. Evidence of good progress was seen in the books of these pupils.
- My final line of enquiry was to look at the opportunities pupils have to read in school, especially in key stage 2. I wanted to find out if older pupils were reading books which were sufficiently challenging.
- As a result of good phonics teaching in the early years and key stage 1, the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in phonics has improved to above average. Reading results are above average at the end of Year 1. Although pupils' progress in reading has improved, it is still below average at the end of key stage 2.
- Pupils in Year 4 who read to me were enthusiastic readers and were reading books suitable for their age. All of the pupils were able to read with a high degree of fluency and most were able to use expression well to bring the story to life. Year 6 pupils told me that they had opportunities to read through the school

day. They appreciate the new books that the school has purchased. All of the pupils read at least the expected five times per week at home and proudly wore their reading reward badges. Pupils have the opportunity to read fiction and non-fiction books. They also have good opportunities to read in subjects other than English.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers across the school consistently provide pupils with work that challenges them and extends their learning well, especially for middle-ability pupils and the most able
- they redouble efforts to engage with the small minority of families who do not send their children to school regularly.

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

Yours sincerely

Caroline Pardy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection I held discussions with you, the deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, and phase and subject leaders for mathematics and English. I also met with five members of the governing body. To follow up my lines of enquiry, I visited classrooms with phase leaders to evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. Together with school leaders, I looked at work in pupils' exercise books to review the quality of their work over time. I observed pupils' behaviour around the school in lessons and at lunchtime, where I also spoke to them informally about their experience of school. In addition, I listened to a group of Year 4 pupils read and talked to a group of Year 6 pupils about reading. I studied your improvement plan, self-evaluation and policies relating to behaviour and keeping pupils safe. I checked the documents on the website. I considered the views of 123 parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including 39 free-text responses. In addition, I took account of the 93 responses to the pupil questionnaire and the 36 responses from the staff questionnaire.