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2 October 2018

Mrs Kim Perez
Headteacher
Thorley Hill Primary School
Park Lane
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Dear Mrs Perez

Short inspection of Thorley Hill Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 19 September 2018, 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 April 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. This is a securely good school. High-quality leadership has ensured that over the last three years, overall attainment has remained consistently high. Since the last inspection, significant improvements have been made to the teaching of writing. Furthermore, many more of the school's most-able pupils are exceeding the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics.

Your evaluation of the school's performance is honest and accurate. You show a thorough understanding of where the school's strengths and weaknesses lie, and the actions needed to improve further. All staff and governors feel that the school has improved under your clear, coherent leadership. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They greatly appreciate what staff do to provide their children with a safe, stimulating environment in which to learn.

Assessment information confirms that good teaching in Nursery and Reception ensures that children get off to a good start. They are well prepared for further learning in key stage 1. Almost all pupils acquire a thorough understanding of phonics and gain the necessary reading, oracy and mathematical skills needed for key stage 2. Most pupils continue to make rapid progress, so that by the end of Year 6 the proportions of them working at, or beyond, the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics are well above national averages.

School is a safe, stimulating and enjoyable place to be. Pupils' enjoyment of school is shown in their regular attendance. No pupils are excluded from school. Pupils told me that school is a friendly place to be, and that: 'It doesn't matter if you're different, because pupils really respect each other.' Staff, pupils and parents who

shared their views during the inspection confirm that behaviour is good. They commented favourably on the school's caring and respectful ethos. One parent said: 'Staff are happy, and children are happy, contributing to a positive atmosphere and wonderful ethos that echoes throughout the school.'

You have maintained a relentless focus on improving teaching by empowering staff to develop their own practice and to lead improvements. All teachers take responsibility as subject leaders and evaluate strengths and weaknesses, and implement plans for making improvements to their subjects. This adds significantly to the school's capacity to improve.

Experienced and knowledgeable governors provide you with regular support and challenge. They share your ambitions for the school, and value your work highly. You meet regularly with one of your governors to maintain a clear oversight of safeguarding matters.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is prioritised and managed effectively. Suitable policies and procedures are in place to keep pupils safe from harm. The single central record of checks on adults working with pupils is well maintained. You and your deputy headteacher share responsibility for managing concerns raised by staff about pupils' safety and welfare. These matters are followed up systematically. Safeguarding training for staff, including the 'Prevent' duty, is up to date. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe in school and when online. The school site is secure. Public access to buildings is carefully controlled. Pupils told me that if they had any concerns about their safety, they could approach any member of staff who would help them sort things out.

Inspection findings

- To determine whether the school remained good, I followed four key lines of enquiry during the inspection. These were based on the school's recent performance information, and an analysis of its website. I focused on: gaining leaders' views of the quality of teaching, and the actions taken to improve it; the achievement of a very small minority of pupils known to be disadvantaged or have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities; pupils' writing in a range of subjects across the curriculum; and whether the school is a safe, stimulating and enjoyable place to be.
- Good teaching over time has led to sustained high attainment. Over the last three years, the proportion of pupils working at the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics in both key stages has remained well above average. Over the past two years, more than 90% of pupils have achieved the expected standard in national tests of grammar, punctuation and spelling. Based on their average starting points, this represents good progress.
- The last inspection report asked you to fully extend the learning of your most-able pupils. You have done this successfully. You have raised expectations of teachers and the greater challenge that they provide for pupils in lessons. This has led to a significant rise in the proportion of pupils exceeding the expected

standard. This year, over 70% of Year 6 pupils attained the higher standard in reading and 57% of them did so in mathematics. Significantly, 47% of pupils attained above the expected standard in writing, which is much higher than in the past.

- Progress made by pupils by the end of key stage 2 in reading is above average. Until recently, it had been broadly average in writing and in mathematics. The situation has improved this year; pupils have made good progress in mathematics and improved progress in writing. Your determination to improve the teaching of writing and provide pupils with many more opportunities to develop their writing has led to improved progress and significantly higher attainment. This year, the proportion of pupils working at or exceeding the expected standard in writing at the end of both key stages has risen.
- A very small minority of pupils who have SEN or are eligible for the pupil premium make less progress than others. You have recognised that more needs to be done to enable these pupils to make better progress. 'Pupil passports' introduced last year are helping to ensure that all staff know who these pupils are. These passports list pupils' particular needs, interests and any extra help that they might need, enabling staff to personalise support for them.
- Gaining greater consistency in the quality of teaching has underpinned your pursuit to become an outstanding school. Systematic monitoring, including regular 'drop-ins' by leaders, has identified accurately what teachers do well, and what needs improving. This has informed additional training for staff, encouraged the sharing of best practice and engendered a collective willingness to improve. However, recent changes in staffing due to promotion and maternity leave have led to some inconsistencies.
- You acknowledge that some new staff need developing further to enable them to match the high-quality teaching of your most effective practitioners. Our joint observations found a range of strengths. For example, we noted that teachers forge good relationships with pupils and manage their behaviour well. Expectations are high. Pupils are encouraged to learn alongside a partner to develop good vocabulary and oracy skills. They use the school's 'gold standard' guidance well to enhance their writing, and to understand how to evaluate their writing to seek further improvement.
- Our learning walk also revealed some weaknesses. Not all teachers make good use of resources to ensure that pupils are fully engaged in learning, or to check that individual pupils fully understand what to do. At times, lesson introductions fail to capture and retain pupils' interest. Their progress slows when tasks are not challenging enough. Teaching assistants are not always deployed effectively to support small groups of learners. We saw few examples of teachers targeting their questioning to fully engage disadvantaged pupils or those who have SEN in learning.
- An enriched curriculum enables pupils to achieve well, develop a wide range of personal and social skills, and enjoy school life. Pupils told me that they really enjoy reading, mathematics and art because teachers make learning fun. Reading is popular with pupils. They say that they would like to use the library more often than they do. Off-site visits are used well to enhance pupils' learning.

Most pupils engage in a range of clubs at lunchtimes and after school.

- You and your team continue to seek continued improvement. You have introduced a new curriculum this year to raise achievement further and enrich pupils' learning and enjoyment of school. All staff have been fully involved in devising new, high-quality planning materials which aim to ensure that pupils learn in-depth and develop a wide range of skills that can be applied across a variety of subjects. This is very new. You acknowledge that this approach will need evaluating fully at regular intervals to check that the new curriculum leads to the same above average outcomes achieved in recent years.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the new curriculum is fully evaluated at regular stages to check that it contributes fully to maintaining pupils' high achievement
- inconsistencies in teaching are ironed out by providing tailored training and support for those staff who need it.

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

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your deputy headteacher, the junior leadership team, seven members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I took time during lunchtime to speak informally with pupils and staff. You and I carried out a learning walk, visiting lessons to observe pupils at work. I reviewed your self-evaluation and school improvement plans. I also scrutinised your safeguarding policy and procedures, including the single central record, and behaviour and attendance logs. I considered 96 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, 90 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for pupils and 28 responses from staff.