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Paul Campbell  
Executive headteacher  
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Dear Mr Campbell

### **Short inspection of Thomas Arnold Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 14 November 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 July 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment as executive headteacher in October 2017, you have used the knowledge and experience of your governing body and your senior leaders extremely well. Collectively, you have made sure that school improvement planning is based on a detailed analysis of the school's performance information.

You, governors and all staff have a very clear understanding of the strengths of the school. Together, you are taking swift action to bring about improvements where they are needed. Your relatively new senior and middle leadership teams at Thomas Arnold have benefited from the links made with your other school.

Staff new to their role or to the school are well supported through excellent working relationships with the local authority and a wider network of school-to-school support. This is providing a forum for professional dialogue and the sharing of successful teaching practices. It is also providing further opportunities for monitoring and checking the school's own judgements on the quality of provision.

You and your team have reviewed and carefully considered the purpose of the school curriculum, while explicitly re-establishing whole-school expectations for learning and behaviour. Consequently, staff, pupils, parents and carers know what is taught and why. All know what is expected of them. They value the school's six 'core virtues' of promoting a love of learning, integrity, perseverance, fairness, creativity and zest.

At the previous inspection, inspectors identified that, though good, teaching needed further improvement so that more pupils make rapid progress, particularly in writing. Written work seen in pupils' books clearly demonstrates how effectively leaders and staff have raised the quality of pupils' writing. Consequently, the proportions of pupils attaining the greater depth standards in writing at the end of both key stages 1 and 2 have increased significantly and are above the national averages. Pupils have also improved their handwriting skills. Their good writing is seen in subjects across the curriculum. They review their work, checking for misspellings and take care to produce well-presented work to a high standard.

Following many changes in staffing and a dip in the end-of-key-stage results, pupils' outcomes have risen. In 2018, pupils' progress by the end of key stage 2 was above national averages in all three areas of reading, writing and mathematics. However, as the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in the Year 1 phonic check is not yet in line with national averages, and reading is not as strong as writing and mathematics, reading was identified as a key line of enquiry for this inspection.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff are aware of the latest statutory requirements in 'Keeping Children Safe in Education'. The attention paid by all staff at the school to keeping pupils safe is exemplary. A real culture of care extends across the school. Systems and structures are very robust. Any queries or concerns are followed up immediately.

The school is vigilant in supporting pupils and their families, engaging a wide network of external agencies as necessary. Leaders carefully track the attendance, progress and achievement of vulnerable pupils. They maintain clear, detailed records, sharing this information appropriately when required. Consequently, early help, both internally, through the school's 'Thrive' initiative, and from external agencies, is put into place swiftly for those pupils who need it.

### **Inspection findings**

- In this short inspection, we focused on particular aspects of school life. We looked at what leaders have done to facilitate the recent rapid improvements in pupils' achievement across the school; the contribution made by the school to pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare; and the teaching of reading.
- Governors and the local authority reacted quickly to weak end-of-key-stage results in 2017, with actions including your appointment as executive headteacher and a strengthening of the educational expertise represented on the governing body. Governors are ambitious for the school, as shown by their insistence on effective staff professional development and in securing the best learning environments for pupils. Their actions have facilitated and contributed to the rapid improvements in pupils' achievement across the school.

- Leaders have strongly promoted improvement in the quality and consistency of teaching. Adults at the school regularly meet to discuss and review their teaching practice. This has included the use of video to reflect on practices that are most effective in supporting pupils' progress in their learning and personal development. Staff discuss their teaching practice with others, meeting colleagues at other schools to sample and moderate pupils' work.
- The use of assessment has also improved. Teachers use the school's assessment and feedback policy well. They use their knowledge of how pupils are doing to identify whether further support is required. Timely assessments ensure that clear teaching programmes are in place for those who speak English as an additional language or with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Together, these initiatives have contributed to pupils' improving progress and attainment across the school. Pupils learn well because the teachers and other adults providing support have high expectations of what they can and should achieve.
- Our next line of enquiry was the school's support for pupils' personal development, welfare and behaviour. Leaders have analysed patterns of behaviour across the school. This has provided them with a clearer oversight of need, enabling them to take appropriate action. Staffing structures have been reviewed to make sure that pupils have the care and support they need in and out of classes. Clear expectations have been set for pupils' conduct. Alternative provision has been introduced successfully for those pupils who need additional behaviour and learning support.
- Pupils behave well in classes. They are polite and courteous to visitors and are fully engaged when at play. They were seen managing, among themselves, the numerous games they have been taught at school, under the vigilant eyes of staff. Pupils are caring and considerate towards their peers, for example when taking turns to play on the outdoor trampolines.
- Finally, we looked at the school's actions to improve the teaching of reading, which is a priority arising from your school's self-evaluation. Leaders initially focused on ensuring consistency in the teaching of phonics in the early years and at key stage 1. Teachers now have clearer expectations for progression in phonics, which in turn is helping to improve outcomes.
- You have also reviewed how reading is taught and supported throughout the school, trying out different approaches. Recently, daily supported reading has been introduced in Year 1. The carefully chosen texts are providing pupils with increased opportunities to build on their phonic knowledge, sounding out new words. These sessions are also helping pupils to broaden their vocabulary and develop strategies to find meaning in the texts they are reading. The daily supported reading approach is now being extended to other year groups. Additionally, staff are reviewing provision for reading in the whole curriculum, giving careful consideration to book choices to support the increasing proportion of pupils working at the high standards in reading.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to strengthen the teaching of reading across the school so that:
  - the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in phonics by the end of Year 1 is in line with or exceeds the national average
  - the proportions of pupils attaining the expected and high standard in reading by the end of key stage 2 increase.

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

Yours sincerely

Jean Thwaites  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection I met with you, your head of school and a group of middle and senior leaders. I also met with a representative from the local authority and two governors, including the chair of the governing body. I held discussions with staff responsible for safeguarding, behaviour and welfare. I spoke informally to staff, contractors and visitors during the day. I also spoke to pupils in the playground and in classes and met with some representatives from the school council. The 34 replies to the staff survey were considered. The 39 responses to Parent View, the online parent survey, and the 166 responses to the school's own recent parent questionnaire were taken into account, along with the 23 comments received electronically. We visited classes together to observe teaching and I looked at pupils' work in their books. I also reviewed a range of documentation including records of your checks to keep children safe. Leaders' own evaluations of the school's performance and records of pupils' achievements were also considered.