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Mrs Jennifer Watt
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Watt

Short inspection of Thornley Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 December 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 March 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your unwavering dedication to staff, parents and pupils at this inclusive and nurturing school serves Thornley Primary School very well. You are highly supported by your deputy headteacher, other leaders and a team of committed staff. As a result, you have all created a school that is happy, welcoming and successful.

You have created an ethos in the school that is characterised by strong and purposeful relationships. You and your staff know pupils very well. You all understand the barriers pupils may face, work collectively to benefit pupils and use this as a basis to truly nurture them. This provides pupils with high-quality care, that includes strongly developing their social and moral values. For example, during the inspection, pupils in Years 5 and 6 were involved in presenting to their parents a culmination of their work on Sikhism. This included sharing what they had learned about the Sikh religion, beliefs and values and also preparing and sharing with them food from the Sikh culture. During this event, there was an evident buzz in the room as pupils, parents and staff all beamed with pride at their work to celebrate diversity.

You, other leaders and governors have a candid view of the school's strengths and those areas that need further work. As a result, your school self-evaluation is accurate, and your school improvement plan precisely reflects the actions that are being taken to improve the school and pupils' experiences.

At the time of the previous inspection, you were asked to further improve the quality of teaching in the school and improve the skills of leaders so they have more opportunities to check on pupils' learning in their subject areas. Teaching in the school has evidently improved and strengthened since the previous inspection. It is characterised by learning and activities that are well-planned and subsequently meet the needs of individual pupils. For example, teachers' use of and collaboration with support staff is excellent. These skilled staff work alongside the most vulnerable pupils to prompt and check on their learning and progress. As a result, this is enabling current pupils, particularly those with support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to make good progress and grasp new ideas and concepts at a similar rate to their peers.

Both senior and middle leaders are astute and tenacious in their roles. Leaders' skills, at all levels, have developed since the time of the previous inspection. Your and other leaders' skills are incisive and you all have a clear view of pupils' progress and learning across each subject and year group. For example, the special educational needs, English and mathematics coordinators are highly effective in their roles. This is because they have a detailed and thorough understanding of the areas they lead and can pin down precisely what needs to be done to improve individual pupils' rates of progress, although leaders do acknowledge that there is still some work to do to secure consistency in disadvantaged pupils' outcomes.

As a result of strong and effective teaching, pupils' outcomes continue to improve and have been sustained over time. By the end of key stage 2, pupils' attainment combined in reading, writing and mathematics has consistently been well above the national average. While, disadvantaged pupils' attainment is also showing signs of improvement, it has not been as consistent as that of other pupils in the school and nationally. Over time, by the end of key stage 1, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics has been broadly in line with the national averages. Similar to key stage 2, disadvantaged pupils' outcomes have not been as strong as other pupils, although showing signs of improvement in 2018 and for current pupils. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher standards has shown incremental improvement since the previous inspection. However, leaders acknowledge that work must continue to ensure that a greater proportion of pupils reach the higher standards by the end of each key stage, particularly in writing.

In the early years, a number of children enter with starting points below those typically seen nationally. Despite this, strong and ambitious leadership and highly effective staff ensure that children make rapid developments in important areas, particularly in speech, language and communication. The early years provision provides a creative environment for children to develop their personal and social skills too. As a result, children play and learn well together, turn-taking appropriately and practising their letter formation skills to develop their early fine-motor and writing skills during well-planned opportunities.

Pupils are exceptionally well-mannered. Their excellent behaviour and strong attitudes to learning are a strength of the school. Pupils behave well during lessons

and their conduct around school is calm, orderly and respectful. They care about each other and their school. They are friendly, get along well together and show great pride in their work, appearance and their school. They value and appreciate the work of adults in the school. A very warm welcome is given to visitors. A smile is commonplace in Thornley Primary School.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Pupils' safety and welfare are of the utmost importance and you, ably supported by other staff in the school, take your responsibilities to keep pupils safe very seriously and act decisively to address any concerns.

School policies and procedures are clear and thorough, and you are tenacious in following up issues or concerns. Records are meticulously kept, and staff training is up to date. There are clear procedures in place so that any staff, volunteer or visitor in the school is appropriately checked and vetted.

In this inclusive and nurturing school community, the school's work to promote tolerance, diversity and respect leads to a positive ethos where pupils feel valued.

The positive ethos you and other staff have created permeates the whole school. For example, pupils are able to discuss personal safety and how the school's curriculum provides them with, age-appropriate, opportunities to learn about how to stay safe and keep each other safe. Pupils spoken to during the inspection, and a large number of parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree that the school is a safe and happy place.

Inspection findings

- An area that I explored during the inspection was how leaders' actions were building on and sustaining improvements in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND in both key stages 1 and 2. This is because in both key stages these two groups of pupils' outcomes have been inconsistent compared to other pupils in the school and nationally.
- Despite improvements by the end of key stage 2 in 2018, you and other staff are not complacent. As a result, you have a clear strategy in place to ensure that the progress and learning of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND continue to accelerate. For example, your special educational needs coordinator has a holistic view of the needs of pupils in the school with SEND. This is providing her with a firm basis to plan, provide and deploy effective support both in and outside of the classroom, so that their progress and learning accelerates. This was particularly evident in a Year 3 mathematics session observed, when a small group of identified pupils were encouraged to think for themselves and solve the problems they had been posed when using fractions. As a result, pupils' resilience was being developed and they were able to work at a rate similar to their peers in the class. Therefore, standards for current pupils with SEND in the school are steadily improving.

- Teachers plan activities that develop and consolidate pupils' knowledge and understanding. The curriculum is interesting to pupils and engages them in their learning. As a result, pupils make strong gains in their learning and progress in a wide range of subjects, but particularly in mathematics. However, in a minority of instances, some disadvantaged pupils do not accelerate in their learning as much as their peers, although teachers' swift movement around the room benefits pupils as they use their expertise effectively to support pupils and tackle any misunderstandings or misconceptions they may have quickly.
- You and governors have a sharp understanding of how additional funding is used to effect the learning and progress of disadvantaged pupils. You use additional funding well to support these pupils and make regular checks so that you can ensure it having the desired impact on pupils' learning and progress. While strategies that are in place, particularly around improving disadvantaged pupils' speech, language and communication skills, are improving outcomes for this group of pupils, you agree that not enough achieve the standards expected of them by the end of each key stage. However, you, governors and other leaders are continuing to reflect on and evaluate the strategies in place so that improvements in disadvantaged pupils' progress are sustained.
- An area that I also explored was how well teachers challenge pupils in their learning so that a greater proportion have opportunities to work at the higher standards. Over time, the proportion of pupils working at a higher standard, while improving, has been inconsistent.
- Teaching observed and work in pupils' books demonstrates that current pupils are routinely challenged in their learning and they are given a wide range of opportunities to explore topics and concepts in detail across the curriculum. Nevertheless, there are times when opportunities are not taken to sufficiently deepen pupils' skills. This has resulted in the proportion of pupils working at the higher standards being inconsistent.
- Despite this, current strategies to identify and target pupils is enabling more to apply and consolidate those skills needed to reach the higher standards in their reading, mathematics and particularly writing. For example, additional support for current pupils to practise and apply their deeper understanding of skills in writing, in upper key stage 2, is benefiting them as they get to grips with complex style features when writing for different purposes.
- Next, I wanted to explore what leaders were doing to improve pupils' rates of attendance. This is because over the past three years pupils' attendance rates have fluctuated in comparison to the national averages. Current pupils' attendance shows improvement in comparison to the same period last academic year; this is overall and for disadvantaged pupils. Attendance overall is currently in line with the national average, which is having a positive impact on improving the progress pupils make. Consequently, there has also been a reduction in the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent.
- In the main, this is underpinned by the fact that pupils enjoy coming to school. Refined strategies and close monitoring of pupils ensures that any whose attendance falls below the school's threshold are captured early. For example, strong systems are in place to identify quickly when a pupil is not in school. Staff

act swiftly through early morning checks and phone calls home. You and relevant staff are persistent in checking with parents the reasons for absence. You are all aware of the most vulnerable pupils in the school and make these a priority for your daily checks. As a result, there are a number of individual pupils whose attendance has improved so far this academic year.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- outcomes for disadvantaged pupils continue to improve by the end of key stages 1 and 2
- teachers provide more opportunities to challenge and deepen pupils in their learning so that a greater proportion of pupils reach the higher standards they are capable of, particularly in writing.

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

Yours sincerely

Darren Stewart
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and other leaders, including governors, to evaluate the strengths and areas you are further developing across the school. We also discussed improvements since the previous inspection. Together with you and your early years leader, I visited all classes in each phase of the school. I reviewed work in pupils' books across a range of year groups and subjects, particularly focusing on the progress of disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. I discussed with you current pupils' assessment information. I spoke to pupils, both formally and informally, about their learning and experiences of school. I listened to a group of pupils read and discussed their experiences of reading at the school with them. I read and scrutinised a wide range of school documentation, including the school self-evaluation document, the school's improvement plan, attendance information and documents relating to behaviour, exclusions, safeguarding and child protection.

I also took into account the 18 responses to Parent View and the 11 free-text responses from parents. No pupils or staff completed their respective surveys, although I spoke to both pupils and staff, formally and informally, during the inspection.