

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



17 January 2019

James Malley
Headteacher
Therfield School
Dilston Road
Leatherhead
Surrey
KT22 7NZ

Dear Mr Malley

Short inspection of Therfield School

Following my visit to the school on 8 January 2019 with Sue Bzikot, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in March 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Therfield is a friendly and welcoming school where inclusion really matters. You lead the school with clarity and determination. Pupils, staff and parents value your open and approachable style. You are ably supported by your senior and middle leaders and strong governors, all of whom are equally committed to improving the school. Staff feel valued and empowered. One wrote, 'There is an emphasis on staff happiness here that goes a long way.'

The school is characterised by a nurturing and caring ethos. There are strong relationships between staff and pupils that underpin a positive atmosphere in which pupils want to learn. Staff know their pupils well and provide high-quality support to develop pupils' learning. As a result, pupils make good and, in some subjects, better progress from their starting points.

A high proportion of parents who responded to the survey are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They appreciate the caring ethos and the efforts of staff to help their children succeed. One parent said, 'Therfield is a school where pupils can flourish and excel, in an environment of encouragement and care.' The rising number of pupils on roll is evidence that the school is gaining the confidence of the local community.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and told inspectors that teachers care about them and lessons are fun. They are generally respectful of each other and happily mingle during breaktimes and lunchtimes. In lessons, they work well together and are confident to express their ideas. They behave well around the school and are friendly and polite to visitors.

Leaders focus strongly on developing teachers' expertise. There is a comprehensive training programme that enables staff to learn from each other, both within school and across the trust. Teachers also meet together regularly to compare pupils' work and make sure that their assessments of learning are accurate. Leaders support and challenge teachers in equal measure and hold them to account for the progress that pupils make. As a result, standards have risen since the previous inspection.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors asked leaders to give pupils better guidance on how to improve their work, match work better to pupils' needs and monitor sixth-form students' progress more closely. Leaders and governors have tackled these issues effectively. During the inspection, inspectors saw many examples, both in lessons and in pupils' books, of teachers' thoughtful guidance to help pupils develop their learning. Pupils told inspectors that they value the advice that they are given, and that it helps them to make better progress. Pupils understand their academic targets and routinely tackle work that makes them think hard. Students' progress in the sixth form is rigorously monitored. As a result, students make strong progress in A-level subjects.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that there is a strong culture of safeguarding within the school. Staff and governor training is well planned and is up to date. Leaders have ensured that all statutory safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and record-keeping is thorough and methodical. Governors keep a close eye on safeguarding arrangements. At governors' request, leaders regularly update them on staff and pupils' mental health and well-being. Leaders work with the local authority and outside agencies to ensure that pupils get the help they need.

Pupils who responded to the online questionnaire, and those interviewed by inspectors, said that they felt safe in school. They know who to go to if they are experiencing any difficulties, and they are confident that it will be dealt with. Pupils are taught how to stay safe through assemblies, tutor-time activities and through their personal, social and health education lessons. Safety is a recurring theme in many lessons. For example, during the inspection, Year 7 pupils, in an information technology lesson, were eagerly discussing how to stay safe on social media sites.

Inspection findings

- Over time, pupils have made particularly strong progress in English. Inspectors were therefore keen to explore the reasons for this success and how leaders are helping weaker subject areas to replicate it. The English department is well led and managed. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and are a cohesive

and talented team. Lessons are characterised by very high expectations of what pupils can do and achieve. Activities are challenging and varied, enabling pupils to develop their analytical and creative skills. Pupils' extended writing is of high quality. Pupils told inspectors how much they enjoy their lessons and appreciate the explicit guidance that they receive about how to improve their work.

- English teachers have liaised closely with colleagues in neighbouring primary schools to ensure that the English curriculum at Therfield builds on the primary provision. As a result, teachers have a clear and systematic approach to building pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding over time. Pupils in English make very good progress, including those pupils who are disadvantaged. The rates of progress of disadvantaged pupils often exceed their non-disadvantaged peers.
- Inspectors saw good-quality teaching in the vast majority of lessons in subjects other than English. Pupils are keen to learn, and work is generally well matched to their needs. However, pupils' rates of progress are often slower than in English, especially in humanities and in some other subjects, such as art and business studies. You acknowledge that there is more to do to pin-point the reasons for this, and to learn from the good practice in English.
- Inspectors looked at the quality of the curriculum and how it is enabling all pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, to maximise their progress. Leaders have made the progress of disadvantaged pupils a key school priority. Teachers know these pupils well and monitor their progress regularly. Senior and middle leaders discuss pupils' performance every six weeks and swiftly put interventions in place when pupils are found to be falling behind. Leaders regularly evaluate these interventions to see if they are working. As a result, disadvantaged pupils made better progress in 2018 GCSE examinations in a number of subjects compared with the year before.
- You regularly review the curriculum to ensure that it is meeting the needs of all pupils. Teachers in all subjects have already begun work on the curriculum to ensure that pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding are built sequentially from Year 7 onwards. However, you recognise that the curriculum that some pupils follow at Key Stage 4, especially disadvantaged pupils, is not ambitious enough to prepare them for their future. Too few are studying the full suite of English Baccalaureate subjects and the number choosing a modern foreign language is low. Consequently, a significant proportion of pupils are not maximising their potential.
- Lastly, inspectors looked at how well leaders are promoting positive attitudes in pupils and whether this is having an impact on reducing the number of exclusions. Leaders have introduced a robust behaviour-management system which focuses on rewarding good behaviour. This is having a positive effect. In class, inspectors saw pupils keen to learn and eager to be rewarded for their efforts. Classes are orderly and pupils respond well to teachers' requests. They set to work quickly and work very well together. The inclusive nature of the school means that staff go to great lengths to help pupils manage their behaviour and support their learning and development. Pupils who have specialist provision in the Communication and Interaction Needs resource base are very well supported in both mainstream and withdrawal lessons and make strong progress.

As a result of this rigorous and positive approach to managing behaviour, exclusions are reducing steadily.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to address the remaining variations in the rates of progress that pupils make in some subjects
- they review the curriculum to ensure that it is sufficiently ambitious for all pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, to make the maximum progress at Key Stage 4.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the executive headteacher of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Surrey. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paula Sargent
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors held meetings with you, other school leaders, teachers, four members of the governing body and a group of pupils. The lead inspector also had a telephone conversation with the executive headteacher of the multi-academy trust. We observed pupils' learning in a series of short visits to a number of lessons. All of these visits were conducted jointly with members of the school's staff. We scrutinised a range of school documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the school's improvement plan, safeguarding records, and information about pupils' achievement, behaviour and attendance. We considered the views expressed in 196 responses by parents to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the 195 free-text comments by parents, together with 107 questionnaires returned by pupils and 63 returned by school staff.