

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



17 July 2019

Mrs Susan Cook
Headteacher
West Thurrock Academy
Schoolfield Road
Grays
Essex
RM20 3HR

Dear Mrs Cook

Short inspection of West Thurrock Academy

Following my visit to the school on 9 July 2019, 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 second short inspection carried out since your predecessor school was judged to be good in December 2010. The previous short inspection took place in January 2016.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

The school is a very welcoming, exciting and vibrant place for pupils to learn. The school's motto, 'strength and courage', is known by pupils, and they strive to develop these traits during their time at the school. The school's logo of a lion is also put to good use to portray your four school values of 'responsibility, aspire, achieve and respect' (RAAR!) and pupils model these exceptionally well. Pupils speak proudly about their school and of their achievements. Many spoken to said it was as good as it could be, and struggled to say how it could be improved further.

Pupils are articulate, confident and resilient. They behave well in school and have very positive attitudes towards their learning, as well as a high level of respect for their teachers. They say that bullying is an extremely rare occurrence. They value the opportunities you give them to develop their leadership. For example, all pupils belong to the school council and others are prefects. They are also very accepting of pupils' differences and believe that whatever a person's differences, everyone should be treated the same.

You strive to provide pupils with a positive experience of school, beyond that in the classroom. Pupils maintain their own vegetable garden, go to Barcelona in Year 6 and many take advantage of the numerous sporting activities on offer.

High-quality teaching over time has ensured that pupils' outcomes are well above average by the end of key stage 2. Indeed, the school was recognised by the Department for Education for pupils' impressive progress in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 in 2018, which placed the school in the top 3% of schools in England. You have maintained these high standards, as indicated in the provisional key stage 2 outcomes which became available on the day of this inspection. Children make impressive progress from low starting points to attain well by the end of Reception. Pupils make even better progress as they approach the end of key stage 2. Mathematics is taught especially well, and strong progress is made in this subject with very little variation between different groups of pupils.

You and your governing body are determined to provide the best quality of education for all pupils. This is reflected in your comprehensive school improvement plan, which is informed through your systematic self-evaluation processes. You try hard to engage with all parents and carers, some of whom are reluctant to get more involved with the school. Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were full of praise for the staff at the school. One parent wrote, 'Hats off to them. They all do a great job.'

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding at the school. The school's arrangements for safeguarding are fit for purpose. Staff approach safeguarding matters with vigilance. They have been issued with all the required documentation and their training is fully up to date. The school's record of staff's suitability to work with children is compliant with current requirements.

Child protection records are meticulously maintained and kept secure. They record essential details in chronological order and report on the outcome of each individual case.

Pupils feel safe in school and they are supervised well during their non-teaching time. Procedures for allowing visitors into the school are rigorously applied and pupils' health and safety on the site are priorities. Any external speakers who make presentations to pupils have their presentation checked beforehand to ensure that the content is entirely appropriate.

Inspection findings

- I looked at how well leaders had addressed the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection of January 2016. This was to give me an indication of the impact of leadership over time. Previously White British pupils were not making as strong progress as others in the school.

- White British pupils have been provided with a significant number of additional sessions in phonics, reading and mathematics across all phases of the school. Specialist teaching assistants have been deployed to target this group of pupils. You have looked at the way teaching is delivered, particularly in Year 6, and have adopted a secondary school model when teaching the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. This approach has provided pupils with a more in-depth experience of key subjects and has had a positive impact on helping more White British pupils to work at greater depth or the higher standards. The focus on continuing to improve writing outcomes across the school, however, remains a whole-school priority.
- Governors quickly took on board the comments made about their lack of challenge to senior leaders in the previous report. They have carried out a lot of research into what it means to be an effective 'critical friend'. They also explored any barriers that were preventing them from being fully effective. An audit of their skills has now ensured that they provide a higher degree of challenge using their wide-ranging expertise. This is evident from minutes of their meetings.
- The impact of pupil premium funding is carefully evaluated to ensure that it benefits the many disadvantaged pupils in the school. These pupils are targeted through the many booster classes, which also take place at the weekend and during the holidays. These pupils are also carefully monitored to ensure that they do not miss out on the many extra-curricular opportunities on offer and they are financially supported if necessary to ensure they have the same opportunities as other pupils in the school. Disadvantaged pupils in the school are achieving well.
- I wanted to explore whether pupils made equally strong progress in subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics. You have given careful consideration to your curriculum, so much so that you have now created curriculum blocks to ensure full coverage of subjects other than English and mathematics (the foundation subjects). I visited a number of lessons, including those in design and technology, religious education, geography and physical education. Pupils' books show strong progress over time, although the school's own systems to measure progress in the foundation subjects are at a very early stage of development.
- It is clear that you have looked at how the curriculum supports pupils' development of knowledge and skills as they progress through the school. Themes and topics have been purposely mapped out. For example, in a design and technology lesson, pupils were eagerly cutting up pieces of clay to produce a wattle-and-daub effect to create Anglo-Saxon houses. At the same time, they were learning about the Anglo-Saxon period in history. Both of these subjects, therefore, were contributing to their knowledge and understanding of this period of history. Extra-curricular activities have included discussions as to whether the school rules are right or wrong, and about the disposal of plastic materials in our oceans.
- I also looked at how well leaders are diminishing the differences in the progress made by some of the different groups of pupils in the school, notably boys and girls, and disadvantaged pupils and others. Your additional booster sessions, training for teachers, effective use of teaching assistants and approach towards

the delivery of the curriculum are helping to diminish the differences that previously existed. These differences still exist within the school, but compared with national averages, these groups are nevertheless performing well.

- Finally, I looked at the effectiveness of the school's strategies to reduce the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school. There has been an above-average trend for the past three years. You take pupil absence very seriously and convey to parents and pupils the clear link between regular attendance and good academic progress. You have lengthened the school day by 15 minutes to create longer holidays for pupils so that parents are encouraged not to take holidays during school time. You also meet with parents whose children do not attend school as regularly as they should. These actions have reduced the proportion of pupils who are persistent non-attenders, but this remains a focus for the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- formalise systems to assess pupils' progress in foundation subjects so that these are as rigorous as they are in reading, writing and mathematics
- maintain the whole-school focus on raising standards in writing
- maintain the drive to reduce the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school.

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

Yours sincerely

John Daniell
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and other senior leaders as well as middle leaders. I also met with the chair and three other members of the governing body, as well as eight pupils from key stage 2. I reviewed a wide range of school documentation, including the self-evaluation summary, the school development plan, records of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and minutes of meetings of the governing body.

Together, we visited most classes to observe pupils' learning and to look at the work in their books. I evaluated the effectiveness of the school's management of

safeguarding. I also considered the views of 17 parents who responded to Parent View, and the content of nine free-text comments.