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Mr Peter Rodin
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Rodin

Short inspection of Thamesmead School

Following my visit to the school on 6 June 2017 with Ann Fearon, 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 the school was judged to be good in June 2012.

This school continues to be good.

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

Your strong leadership aims to ensure that the school provides the best possible standard of teaching and learning. School leaders and governors are determined to enable every student to make good progress. Staff are fully committed to the school motto, 'where learning comes first', and provide a wide range of opportunities and support for pupils.

Pupils typically behave well. They are cooperative and respectful towards their teachers and each other. The house system has been successful in developing relationships between different age groups further, and has reinforced a real feeling of belonging. The adjusted school day enables staff to provide a rich after-school programme of clubs supported by other organisations to broaden the extra-curricular opportunities on offer. Pupils mentioned poetry and creative writing as examples of interesting activities they can take part in, alongside their enthusiastic involvement in the sports teams and musical groups.

You provide governors with detailed information on all aspects of school life. Governors attend curriculum reviews for individual subjects and are well informed about the school's strengths and areas for further development. They ensure that any new governors are suitably qualified to add to the wide range of skills and

experiences available in the team. This helps them to support and challenge school leaders effectively.

School leaders have addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. They set ambitious targets which challenge staff to aim high and continuously strive to improve rates of progress for all pupils. Where there has been recent weaker performance in mathematics and humanities, you have taken steps to address the issues. Internal predictions show the good impact of the additional support provided to date for Year 11, but you know you need to ensure that longer-term improvements are secured. You acknowledge that there is more work to be done in achieving better outcomes for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The special educational needs coordinator is reviewing procedures and systems in order to support those pupils more effectively.

You are rightly proud of the success that the school has had over the last few years in improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. You have achieved demonstrable success over time in public examinations for the majority of disadvantaged pupils in your school: current in-school progress information indicates that this success is continuing. School leaders have increased the rigour of procedures to improve attendance with some success, but recognise that vulnerable pupils do not currently attend as well as they should. You also accept that fixed-term exclusions need to reduce further, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding procedures and policies are rigorously applied and records are detailed and of high quality.

You use governors' expertise to support you in providing regular up-to-date training opportunities for staff and pupils. Safeguarding information is also sent out regularly to parents. Staff and governors have undertaken the training relevant to their roles. You ensure that appropriate checks are carried out for all staff appointments and the information is recorded on a single central register.

Pupils are confident that they are well trained in a variety of ways to keep themselves safe, including when online. They learn about risks to their health, well-being and personal safety as part of tutor time activities, assemblies and the citizenship programme. Pupils emphasise that they feel very safe at school. They say that the school community is accepting of difference and that racist incidents or bullying are rare and are dealt with appropriately by staff. Year 10 pupils say that they enjoy religious education lessons, which give them good opportunities to discuss controversial issues in a safe environment.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection, inspectors focused on a number of lines of enquiry. They looked at how effectively leaders and governors use additional funding to ensure that disadvantaged pupils, low-prior-attaining pupils and pupils who have special

educational needs and/or disabilities catch up with other pupils with the same starting points nationally. They considered how well teachers meet the needs of all learners, especially the most able, and how effectively leaders have tackled lower attendance and higher persistent absences for vulnerable groups of pupils. They looked at how effective leaders have been in reviewing the curriculum so that all pupils can make strong progress in all the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects, including modern foreign languages and humanities. They also inspected the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.

- Leaders use additional funding effectively. Their detailed actions have led to rapid improvement in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Public examination results and leaders' current pupil performance information verify this increasingly rapid progress. This was evident to inspectors during their visits to lessons, when looking at pupils' books, and checking how well they were learning. You should be congratulated on this success. You recognise that work to reduce fixed-term exclusions for disadvantaged pupils remains a priority.
- School leaders have prioritised increasing the challenge in lessons for the most able pupils. A group of most-able pupils stated that they enjoyed lessons and that they have easy access to further extension work where needed. They said that they have good relationships with their teachers and feel able to ask for extra help where it is needed. In lessons, pupils' books showed a wide range of resources being used to extend learning for the most able pupils. Pupils also appreciate the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities available after school to help them develop as well-rounded individuals.
- Senior leaders have continued to work on improving whole-school attendance. Pastoral leaders have tightened up procedures, and pupils who have been absent are expected to catch up on any work missed. Leaders work well with other agencies to try and reduce absence. For example, they consult with local medical practitioners to better support pupils with long-term medical issues. However, leaders acknowledge that more work remains to be done to reduce the percentage of vulnerable pupils who are persistently absent from school.
- Previous examination results indicate that pupils make strong progress across many subjects by the end of key stage 4. School leaders remain ambitious to reduce any underperformance. For example, they have highlighted Spanish, humanities and mathematics in the school development plan as subjects to improve this year. You have not shied away from making tough decisions about staffing where teaching was not sufficiently strong. Leaders regularly undertake full curriculum area reviews and they track the difference that extra help makes to pupils' progress.
- The leadership team keeps the curriculum under review, to ensure that it is suitably broad. Pupils have a wide range of options to choose from in key stage 4, and the school has maintained high numbers of pupils in the performing arts, which was formerly a specialism of the school. The curriculum offer is shaped to match the pupils' aspirations and needs. A good example was the introduction of a vocational course for some pupils who wanted that option. A careers adviser arranges interviews and organises other events to support pupils in their plans for the future. All pupils were able to visit a recent careers fair at school, which

was attended by some local employers and local sixth-form colleges. Pupils in Year 8 mentioned how useful they found this event.

- Inspectors observed that some pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make less progress than other pupils in some subjects. There were examples of poor-quality work in books which had not been addressed and some pupils were not engaged in classroom activities. School leaders accept that ensuring that teachers are fully aware of pupils' individual needs and adapt their teaching accordingly is an urgent priority. A helpful training programme has provided teachers with a wider range of teaching strategies for securing better learning for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they reduce the number of fixed-term exclusions, especially for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- they continue to improve teaching and learning in humanities and mathematics so that pupils make the same strong progress in these subjects as in other subjects at the school
- they improve provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, so that they make more rapid progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Beverley Murtagh
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, members of the senior leadership team, and some middle leaders. I also met with members of the governing body and I had a phone call with the school improvement partner. Inspectors observed lessons in a variety of subjects and across different year groups, usually accompanied by a member of your leadership team. We met formally with groups of pupils from Years 8 and 10. Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documentation, including your analyses of pupils' achievement, and pupil attendance information. We looked at school policies, including those for safeguarding. We checked that the single central record complied with requirements. We analysed the 72 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and reviewed previous school surveys from staff and pupils.