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Mrs Kathy Lambert and Mr John Bayes  
Joint Headteachers  
Thurston Church of England Primary Academy  
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Dear Mrs Lambert and Mr Bayes

### **Short inspection of Thurston Church of England Primary Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 31 October 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 predecessor school was judged to be good in December 2012.

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

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

This is the first inspection since the school converted to an academy in January 2016 and joined the Thedwastre Education Trust. You work closely with other schools within the trust in developing leaders with a focus on key school priorities. You and the governors have a shared vision and ambition for the school through the Olympic motto: 'Be the best you can be'. This inspires your pupils to show positive attitudes to learning so that they enjoy school and enjoy learning. This is echoed through the school's vision: 'Working together to inspire, challenge and achieve'.

Pupils have a strong understanding of the school's Christian values – respect, courage and resilience – which are promoted through assemblies and within the school day. This is seen in the respectful way that pupils interact, both with each other and with adults. One pupil described how new pupils quickly settle into school: 'Everyone is kind and nice to you so that if you are alone, someone will come over and play with you.' Parents are generally positive about the school. One parent summed up the views of many, saying, 'There is a good community feel about the school, the teachers are professional and hard-working.' Another parent recognised how 'most importantly, my children are always happy to go to school as they feel safe and secure.'

Pupils behave well in lessons and when moving around the school. They understand that some pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities find it difficult to behave well all of the time. However, the adults help them. They say that

they like the 'learning ladders' as they give you a reminder to behave and keep on track. Older pupils value opportunities to take on additional responsibilities such as play leaders, reading with younger pupils and leading clubs alongside their teachers. This supports pupils as they prepare for the next stage of their education.

As joint headteachers, you are working effectively as a team and have a strong drive to improve outcomes for pupils. The school's self-evaluation is realistic and accurate. You track pupils' progress rigorously, which supports you in holding teachers to account for the attainment and progress of pupils. Staff and governors share a pride in the school's strengths and the priorities identified within the school development plan ensure that the focus is always on the areas that the school can improve further.

Governors are passionate about the school and know it well. They understand their roles and responsibilities, putting their combined knowledge and expertise to good use when carrying out their statutory duties. Governors provide appropriate challenge and support while working well with you and other leaders to monitor closely the school's work, with an increased focus on the impact of actions taken to improve.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders, including governors, ensure that the school meets its statutory duty to keep children safe. Records, including those on the checks carried out on staff who work at the school, are carefully maintained. There are three members of staff trained as designated safeguarding leads, which means that there is always a member of staff in school to deal with any safeguarding concerns. Leaders have an overview of any child protection concerns, which enables them to take appropriate and prompt action. Health and safety checks are completed regularly with the support of external advisors within the trust.

You ensure that training is regularly completed and revisited so that the culture of safeguarding has a high priority. All staff attend safeguarding updates so that they understand what they need to do if they have a concern regarding the safeguarding of pupils. Staff know that they must report concerns straight away. They also receive first-aid training to deal with any emergencies or particular medical needs.

The well-being of both staff and children has a high priority and you have developed an action plan to promote this. Pupils look out for each other and say that they are happy and feel safe in school. This is reflected in the high levels of attendance. Pupils trust adults to resolve any issues that may arise. They say that they are confident that 'Teachers are good at listening to you and will help you to solve problems'. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. This is reinforced in lessons and through posters on display around the school with the key messages and SMART rules – Safe, Meeting, Accepting, Reliable and Tell.

### **Inspection findings**

- I explored a number of key lines of enquiry during the inspection to ascertain whether the school remained good. My first two key lines of enquiry focused on reading and mathematics. This was because, in 2017, there was a dip in attainment

for some groups of pupils in key stage 1 and attainment at the higher standard was below national averages for both reading and mathematics. You explained that there were factors affecting the quality of teaching and learning in key stage 1 which you have addressed. In 2017, attainment in key stage 2 for middle-attaining pupils was below national averages for both reading and mathematics and rates of progress have varied in recent years. You have rightly identified reading and mathematics as a priority for school improvement.

- Leaders have focused on developing fluency and stamina in reading as well as on comprehension skills. Teachers promote the teaching of reading using high-quality texts linked to their topic themes. For example, Year 6 had been reading 'War horse' to increase their knowledge of the First World War. An increasing number of pupils are enjoying reading for pleasure, spurred on by the introduction of the reward systems such as the reading bird or bookmark. Older pupils describe how they support younger pupils by hearing them read at lunchtime. The most able pupils read fluently and show good understanding.
- 'Word of the week' displays, which provide a focus on key vocabulary, were seen in all classrooms. These are being used particularly well with older pupils in broadening their vocabulary and developing their understanding of texts, but you acknowledge that this is less effective with younger pupils. Teachers use questioning well when guiding pupils in their reading and in developing their understanding of what they are reading. Nonetheless, you recognise that there are further opportunities to focus on specific reading skills and key vocabulary linked to the broader curriculum, so that an increasing number of pupils attain the higher standard and make greater progress in developing their skills.
- A new scheme for teaching mathematics has been introduced, which is building up pupil's understanding of concepts through the use of 'concrete, pictorial and abstract' approaches. Teachers are increasingly using practical resources to support pupils in visualising concepts so that they can develop and deepen their understanding. The daily mathematics task is enabling pupils to consolidate skills and learning. It is having a positive impact as pupils are becoming better at recalling number facts and calculations. However, there are fewer opportunities for pupils to apply their knowledge, skills and understanding to problem-solving. Evidence that pupils are developing a deeper understanding and able to apply their knowledge as they master concepts is strong in Years 2 and 6, but less evident in other year groups.
- My final key line of enquiry was to review how successful leaders have been in developing pupils' writing skills across the broader curriculum. Leaders have identified the development of the curriculum as an area for improvement and have introduced the curriculum drivers of creativity, diversity, problem-solving and the world around us. In lessons teachers provide a clear teaching sequence for writing. For example, Year 6 pupils developed their plan to write a letter to their parents from the viewpoint of an evacuee during the Second World War. Pupils in Year 4 were writing a non-chronological report about animals in the rainforest following research. There are good opportunities to talk and share ideas, with additional input from adults.
- There is a strong focus on developing pupils' spelling, grammar and punctuation. Pupils are keen to edit and improve their work. However, not all pupils are readily

joining their handwriting or presenting their work to show their very best. Pupils do not always have resources that they can access to support them when writing independently. There are variations within classes and across subjects as expectations are not always high enough for both the quality and the quantity of work that pupils can do. Teachers are developing opportunities for pupils to write within the broader curriculum and you have identified this as an area for further development as the curriculum evolves.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they further develop the curriculum by:
  - planning increased opportunities for pupils to write at length to embed their writing skills across a range of subjects
  - identifying and promoting the development of reading skills and key vocabulary
  - encouraging pupils to utilise learning resources to support them when working independently
  - applying consistently high expectation of what pupils can achieve in all subjects
- greater opportunities are provided for pupils to apply their mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding to problem solving and to explain their reasoning

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the Thedwastre Education Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Pauline MacMillan  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

We discussed the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, the school's internal evaluation of its performance, plans for future improvement and information about pupils' progress and attainment. During the inspection, I held meetings with you, two subject leaders, three governors, including the chair of the governing body and chair of the trust, the chief executive officer for Thedwastre Education Trust and administrative staff.

Together, we visited every class to look at teaching and learning. I looked at a sample of pupils' current work across a range of subjects. I spoke informally to a number of pupils in classrooms about their learning, heard pupils read and met with a group of

pupils to talk about their school experience. I also observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and as they moved around the classes at different times of the day.

I scrutinised the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures and the records of checks that leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children. I considered the views of parents through 32 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 17 free-text messages. I also took into account 16 responses from staff and 81 responses from pupils to Ofsted's questionnaire.