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Mr Steve Gillan
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Gillan

Short inspection of Thurlbear Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 26 June 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 November 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

Your approach to developing a nurturing community in a secure environment is evident from first entering the school. You make sure that pupils' welfare is at the centre of all decisions and that every child is valued and cared for. Staff members who responded to the staff questionnaire said that they are proud to work at the school. They value your leadership and feel respected by school governors and by the local community.

Parents and carers are welcomed and encouraged to become involved in the life of the school. They are extremely complimentary about the school and the education their children receive. Positive relationships with parents help to break down barriers to learning and raise expectations of pupils. There was an overwhelmingly positive response to Parent View, the online inspection questionnaire, gathered as part of the inspection. One parent summarised the views of many with the comment: 'Thurlbear school has an incredibly strong sense of community where every child is noticed and celebrated.'

Since you became the permanent headteacher in April 2017, you have quickly gained an accurate view of the school's performance. Your prompt and decisive action is further improving pupils' progress. In 2017, the proportion of pupils working at the expected standard in key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics was better than the national average. Results for pupils reaching the

higher standard in reading and mathematics were not as strong, but they are now improving.

The work in pupils' books and the school's assessment information show that pupils in Year 6 are making rapid progress from their starting points. Leaders have made sure that pupils have access to a range of enjoyable activities which challenge them to think hard about their learning. However, you know that the high expectations for Year 5 and Year 6 are not reflected consistently across the classes in lower key stage 2.

You and the new leadership team have ensured that the areas identified for improvement during the previous inspection have been well addressed. Middle leadership is a strength of the school. This is clear in many areas, including literacy, special educational needs and the pupil premium. Middle leaders display the same drive and ambition as senior leaders and reinforce the sense that everyone in the school is focused resolutely on securing good outcomes for pupils.

At the time of the previous inspection, school leaders were asked to ensure that all pupils make rapid and sustained progress in mathematics. Your work in this regard is highly effective. The teaching, learning and assessment of mathematics are strengths of the school. Teachers use assessment well to identify gaps in pupils' understanding of mathematics and they provide plentiful opportunities for pupils to develop fluency when working with numbers. Progress is evident in books, with activities that are matched well to pupils' abilities.

Leaders were also asked to ensure that mathematics activities develop older pupils' confidence and independence. The mathematics subject leader has made sure that pupils have access to a range of inspiring cross-curricular activities which challenge them to think hard about their learning in mathematics. All learners, including the most able, are able to direct their own learning. Pupils use critical thinking skills in mathematics consistently. Pupils decide for themselves which strategies to use to improve their work. Consequently, most pupils are making good progress in their ability to reason and solve problems in mathematics this year.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and staff sustain a positive safeguarding culture across the school. Safeguarding training is regular and detailed so that staff are consistently kept up to date and know what to do if they are concerned about pupils' well-being. For example, reviews of training case studies mean that staff are well informed and kept up to date with best practice and current legislation. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding work in close partnership with external agencies to ensure that everything is being done to minimise pupils' risk of harm.

Pupils feel safe and say that they know whom to go to if they have concerns. Focused work on health and safety ensures that pupils are confident and able to explain what they would do to stay safe when using digital technology.

While the appointment process of staff is thorough, leaders and governors have overlooked some administrative aspects of safeguarding. As a result, aspects of the single central register had to be corrected during the inspection. However, apart from this element of safeguarding compliance and procedure, other aspects of safeguarding meet requirements.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry explored the impact of teaching, learning and assessment on ensuring strong outcomes in key stage 2 for all pupils. Leaders are aware that progress and attainment for the most able was an issue requiring attention and it has been a school development focus since September 2017.
- During our visits to key stage 2 classrooms, we looked for examples of pupils being challenged to reach the higher levels in mathematics. I talked with pupils and asked them to show me the progress that they are making over time, as shown in their workbooks. Higher-attaining pupils in key stage 2 find mathematics activities challenging and make strong progress in mathematical fluency, reasoning and problem solving. Consequently, pupils are now making increased progress to reach the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2.
- In upper key stage 2, work in the most able pupils' English books typically shows writing containing fronted adverbials, expanded noun phrases and a wide range of punctuation used for effect. However, work in topic books shows that there is a limited range of purposeful writing across the curriculum for all pupils. Teachers' expectations of writing in lower key stage 2 are not consistently high. Consequently, some writing is poorly presented, with weak handwriting and spelling.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are making strong progress due to effective pastoral and educational support and challenge. The analysis of pupils' individual needs is enabling the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) to identify barriers to learning and development. Teaching assistants are well trained and undertake rapid and personalised intervention to ensure that any differences are diminished.
- My second key line of enquiry focused on leaders' actions to increase the rate of progress pupils make in reading and mathematics across key stage 1 for those pupils who left the early years at the expected standard. This was because, in 2017, fewer middle-attaining pupils made accelerated progress across key stage 1 to achieve the highest standard.
- Pupils build on strong outcomes in the early years across Years 1 and 2. They are making particularly strong progress in learning phonics. Pupils are systematic in their approach to unfamiliar words and apply their knowledge of phonics to spell words with increasing accuracy. This is evident in their reading and writing. Pupils' reading record books demonstrate that teachers have high expectations that pupils will read regularly in school and at home. As a result, more pupils are going beyond the expected level in reading and writing for their age.

- Progress in mathematics across key stage 1 is strong for all ability groups. Pupils count confidently, recognise shapes and use mathematical vocabulary correctly. Pupils' understanding of problem solving is secure, especially when investigating multiplication and division procedures.
- My final line of enquiry explored the impact of your actions to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence for a small group of disadvantaged pupils. This was due to an uncharacteristic increase in persistent absence in 2017.
- Scrutiny of case studies confirmed that the higher rate of persistent absence was specific to the last academic year and was related to the health and welfare of some pupils with complex needs. Attendance concerns continue to be rapidly addressed. Patterns are analysed and rigorously followed up. Consequently, your persistent absentee rates are now lower and the overall attendance rate is better than the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers, in all classes, have high aspirations and challenge all pupils appropriately
- the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improved by checking that all pupils have more opportunities to develop their ability to write with greater sophistication and complexity across the curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Costello
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and your assistant headteacher and the SENCo. I met with five governors, including the chair of the governing board. I took account of the 56 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the views of parents as they dropped their children off at the start of the school day. Responses to the staff and pupil questionnaires were considered, as well as the views expressed by pupils at lunchtime. Together, we made visits to lessons and examined a sample of pupils' work in books. We scrutinised information about the progress pupils are making. I examined a range of written evidence, including the school improvement plans and attendance and safeguarding documentation.