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Mrs Tracy Harrison  
Headteacher  
Thames Primary Academy  
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Lancashire  
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Dear Mrs Harrison

### **Short inspection of Thames Primary Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 3 May 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 September 2014.

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

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

You and your staff continue to provide a harmonious learning community. Parents and carers told me that their children 'can't wait to get here each day' and that they would attend at weekends if they could. Pupils reiterated this enthusiasm for school life.

You and your deputy headteacher have an accurate and reflective view of the school's strengths and priorities. Together, you are determined to improve the school further. You have high expectations of what you and your staff can achieve, while being mindful and realistic about staff workloads. Governors provide a good balance of support and challenge.

Since the previous inspection, you and the governors have implemented a number of changes throughout the school. For example, you have restructured your senior leadership team and all teachers now have a responsibility for a subject area. You have instilled a strong sense of collaboration among all staff and, as a result, morale is high. You have also invested in refurbishing the interior of the school, which provides a highly stimulating environment for pupils and staff alike.

At the previous inspection in 2014, inspectors asked the leadership team, including governors, to raise achievement, particularly in writing and for the most able pupils. You and your senior leadership team have embedded transparent systems and

procedures for checking the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. You hold staff to account, using precise targets that are linked to accelerating pupils' progress. Pupils have more opportunities to write at length across different subjects and through topics. As a result, pupils' outcomes in writing have improved significantly and are in line with national expectations for their age by the time they leave school. This demonstrates good progress from their starting points.

Teachers plan activities to meet the range of abilities of pupils and adapt work in lessons as needed. The senior leadership team and subject leaders closely monitor the progress of individual pupils and groups of pupils. As a result, teachers are able to plan bespoke support for individuals and groups of pupils who occasionally fall behind with their work and for those who are capable of achieving even more. Consequently, more pupils reached the higher standards by the end of key stage 2 in 2017 and this pattern is continuing across year groups.

As an inclusive school, you work tirelessly to reduce any barriers to learning that pupils may have. For example, pupils have access to a range of therapies and opportunities to develop their social and emotional skills in readiness for learning. The 'Allstars' curriculum is proving effective for pupils who will be moving to special schools at the end of Year 6.

Teachers and teaching assistants ensure that pupils are always given clear guidance about what they need to do to improve their work, and staff check that pupils respond to this advice. Pupils enjoy building their confidence and ability to check their own work as they move through the school.

You and your staff continue to ensure that children get off to a good start in the early years. Parents told me how happily their children settled into Nursery and Reception classes. Staff ensure thorough transition arrangements into the school, which help pupils to settle quickly into their learning.

You and your senior leadership team have led significant improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment since the previous inspection. As a result, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of each key stage was in line with that seen nationally in 2017 and much higher than previously. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education because they develop a strong work ethic during their time at Thames.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Your designated safeguarding leader, together with the deputy designated safeguarding leaders, ensures that all safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. She makes sure that staff fully understand their duty and follow systems and procedures for logging concerns. You ensure that all necessary checks are made on the suitability of staff to work with children. When I arrived at the start of the inspection, the effectiveness of procedures to check on those visiting the school was clear to see. During the inspection, you responded vigilantly to ensure

that the entrance to the school was well staffed in response to the power cut which meant that the electric gates had to be operated manually.

You make sure that the promotion of safeguarding throughout the school has a high profile. You provide staff with regular training that is up to date so that they and members of the governing body understand the current guidance. You and the deputy designated safeguarding leaders are prompt in making referrals to the local authority. Together, you diligently follow up all concerns and make sure that pupils are kept safe. You work well with a range of external agencies to secure expertise to support pupils' welfare, as and when necessary. You and your staff provide exceptional care and support for pupils and their families. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality.

### **Inspection findings**

- As part of this inspection, I looked at how effectively you and your staff are taking action to sustain the improvement in outcomes in reading seen in 2017. You have a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics in Reception, key stage 1 and, when necessary, for older pupils. The senior leader who has responsibility for reading throughout the school ensures that staff have the knowledge, skills and resources they need to teach phonics and reading effectively. In addition to regular high-quality training, your reading champion provides teachers and teaching assistants with weekly 'masterclass' sessions to share and review their practice. This ensures that consistency and high expectations are maintained. As a result, pupils' outcomes in the phonics screening check in Year 1 in 2017 were higher than the national average. Teachers and teaching assistants provide learning activities linked to improving reading that precisely meet the needs of individual pupils. You have invested wisely in new books which are now engaging boys as much as girls. The progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving and is similar to that of others in school. Pupils are becoming competent, confident readers. Their improving vocabulary is also having a positive impact on the quality of their writing. You are aware that teachers and teaching assistants need to continue the drive to move boys on with their reading so that even more reach the expected and higher standards by the end of key stage 1.
- Teachers use assessment information efficiently to identify pupils who are falling behind. Highly trained support staff provide the help pupils need to catch up quickly. The school's own assessment information indicates that the vast majority of pupils are making accelerated progress from their starting points. Younger pupils who need more encouragement to read are allocated older 'reading buddies' as role models and this is proving effective. Pupils told me that they enjoy the opportunities they have to read a wide range of literature. Pupils in key stage 2 were genuinely disappointed when the teacher had to stop reading the story because it was the end of the school day. Workshops for parents on phonics and reading help them develop the skills they need to support their children at home. Despite this opportunity, some parents remain reluctant to listen to their children read.

- Next, I considered the breadth of the curriculum and to what extent it raises pupils' aspirations and provides them with essential opportunities to develop skills. Leaders have developed a new curriculum that is broad and balanced. Teachers ensure that history, geography and other subjects are embedded in topic work and this provides a curriculum that adds interest to learning. In my meeting with pupils, boys and girls alike talked animatedly about topic work and how the trips and visits linked to this stimulate their imagination. Teachers encourage them to find out information for themselves using books and technology and this is developing their reading skills. You closely monitor pupils' engagement with the raft of after-school activities so that all pupils engage in at least one club. Pupils' horizons are broadened by experiences delivered by your staff and, as a result, many aspire to securing graduate jobs.
- Finally, I explored what leaders are doing to address the persistent absence of groups of pupils. I was concerned about the number of pupils who had been persistently absent last year. You provided me with evidence to demonstrate how well you and members of the governing body have continued to take action to improve attendance. Your pupil engagement team follows up in detail those pupils who are late, occasionally absent and persistently absent. They have solid evidence of success but continue to work with some parents who do not help their children to attend regularly enough. You closely monitor the high level of mobility in and out of your school and ensure smooth transitions. Your extensive work with other agencies and the local authority is of a very high calibre. You and your staff are dedicated in maintaining this high level of support for pupils and their families, as a small minority of parents do not ensure that pupils attend as often as possible.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they embed the changes made to the teaching of reading so that a higher proportion of boys work at the standard expected, and at greater depth, by the end of key stage 1
- they build on strategies to improve parental engagement and ensure that parents develop the confidence and the skills to help their children develop a love of reading beyond school
- you, your staff and external agencies continue to work with families whose children's progress is interrupted by too many absences.

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

Yours sincerely

Naomi Taylor  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I observed teaching and learning jointly with you and also with the deputy headteacher. I held meetings with subject leaders, senior leaders, members of the governing body, the designated safeguarding leader and members of the pupil engagement team. I analysed 22 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and I spoke informally with parents at the school gates to seek their views. I also took account of 16 free-text responses from parents. I analysed the 47 staff responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and I spoke to several staff informally during the day. I held a meeting with pupils and spoke informally with pupils during breaks and in lessons. In addition, I analysed 37 responses to Ofsted's online pupil questionnaire. During the inspection, I reviewed a range of school documents. These included the school's development plans and self-evaluation documents, minutes of the governing body meetings, safeguarding documentation, records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance, the school website, school policies, pupils' work and their reading logs.