

8 April 2019

Mrs Suzy Burton and Mrs Lisa Farmer  
Co-headteachers  
Thomas Russell Infants School  
Station Road  
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Staffordshire  
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Dear Mrs Burton and Mrs Farmer

### **Short inspection of Thomas Russell Infants School**

Following my visit to the school on 26 March 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 first short inspection carried out since your predecessor school was judged to be good in March 2014.

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

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

You both provide very effective leadership that has improved the school in many areas since the previous inspection. Staff morale is high and is reflected in the very positive responses from staff to Ofsted's online survey. You work hard as a staff team to promote and uphold the school's values, as stated on its website, 'Our children blossom through nurture and challenge.' The welfare, care and attention your staff provide for pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are first class. The vast majority of parents and carers agree that your school is, as one stated and reflecting the views of most, 'I feel this is a caring and nurturing school in which my child is coming on leaps and bounds.'

Leaders and staff are successful in forging effective partnerships to share good practice through the National Forest Teaching School Alliance and working with schools across the John Taylor Multi-Academy Trust. Together with the deputy headteacher, you provide highly effective leadership and have gained the respect and trust of pupils, parents, staff and governors.

Assessments and pupils' work show that, in relation to their starting points, pupils make strong progress in phonics, reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' independent writing improves very well as they progress from early years through to Year 2. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection. Governors and leaders have recruited and overseen staff development very effectively to maintain high standards in reading, writing and mathematics. The teaching of phonics is highly effective. This is reflected in the consistently high proportion of pupils in key stage 1 who reach the required standard. You have maintained good provision in early years, particularly in providing many opportunities for Reception children to explore and make choices in stimulating indoor and outdoor activities. There is scope now to build on this so that even more children reach a good level of development by the time they start Year 1.

Improvements to the teaching of writing and mathematics in all parts of the school are helping pupils to achieve exceptionally well. You and the staff team have also improved opportunities for pupils to work independently during lessons. This was an area for improvement at the time of the previous inspection. We could see when observing lessons together and talking to pupils, that they thrive on the many opportunities they have to draft and edit their writing. If you recall, one pupil, rightly, told us that she could see her writing getting better, because she has many opportunities to correct spellings and check her work. Another pupil read some of his writing to me. Like many examples of pupils' writing in books and on displays, this was a really golden moment during the inspection. The pupil read aloud from his own composition of an account of 'life in the trenches' during the First World War. I was impressed by the high quality of the pupil's writing. This is typical of many more examples in Year 2. This is because pupils' writing is lively, imaginative and has excellent form and structure. This, as for many other examples in pupils' books and assessments of their work, reflects high-quality teaching and learning throughout key stage 1.

Similarly, the quality of the teaching of reading is strong. Pupils who read to me during some lessons, and assessments of their attainment and progress, show that they make outstanding progress. The focus on literacy, and the attention given to pupils to read a range of good-quality texts, authors and genres, improve their confidence and fluency when reading independently. In addition, these reading skills also improve pupils' use of vocabulary and spelling when writing independently. The leadership of English is strong and the deputy headteacher expertly leads by example in her own classroom. Mathematics teaching and learning have also improved very well since the previous inspection. Pupils have many opportunities to apply mental calculations to solve problems with increasing difficulty, as they take on increasingly challenging problem-solving tasks.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff vetting is rigorous and includes systematic checks on visitors, volunteers, governors and supply staff. The indoor and outdoor areas are clean, safe and secure. Risk assessments of resources and any on-site and off-site

activities are carried out routinely. Training in safeguarding and child protection for all staff is carried out systematically. Staff are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities regarding child protection and the safety of pupils. All parents that I spoke with and all who responded to online surveys and commented by text rightly believe that their children are safe and happy in school.

## **Inspection findings**

- Good use is being made of 'working walls', dictionaries and word banks to support pupils' learning. Visual prompts on displays in classrooms help pupils find information and key words when writing independently. Pupils do very well in mathematics lessons when using practical resources and illustrations to help them apply different methods of calculation.
- Pupils with SEND, including those with cognitive learning difficulties or autism spectrum disorder, do very well. The pupils are treated with care, dignity and respect at all times. Skilful support ensures that teachers and support staff provide the right level of work and interventions for pupils. The support includes one-to-one interaction, sensory therapy and visual prompts, such as cue cards and pictorial stories.
- Assessments in early years show that the children's attainment compares well with national figures. There is potential for even more of them to reach a good level of development and to learn at greater depth by the end of Reception Year. Good provision has been maintained here. Both indoor and outdoor areas are used well to stimulate and interest the children. There is still room for further improvement though, so that children are offered more challenge through questioning and extension tasks when choosing activities for themselves. Early reading and phonics are well taught, and Reception children develop language and literacy skills well.
- The good start made in early years is built upon very well in Years 1 and 2 and represents significant improvement since the previous inspection. National assessments for the last two years show that pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2 compares very well with national figures. Phonics is very well taught in Year 1, providing solid foundations for pupils' early reading development. Pupils are being taught exceptionally well to break down words into composite sounds. The proportion of pupils reaching the highest standards and who are learning in greater depth by the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics is above the national average.
- The school provides strong pastoral care and welfare for pupils. Pupils enjoy school very much, and this is reflected in consistently good attendance. The vast majority of parents responding to surveys are extremely pleased with what the school provides for their children. Comments that represent the views of most parents include: 'My children love school,' 'I feel that [staff] try and develop children in various different types of ways, to develop each child and keep them interested in a mixture of challenges,' and, 'This is a lovely school and my children are doing really well.'
- The partnerships with other schools across the trust help staff to see and share

good practice. The school has maintained a stimulating and broad curriculum that includes the creative and performing arts such as music, dance, role play and drama. Pupils are provided with many opportunities to study history, geography and religious education. British values are taught very well, so pupils learn to appreciate and experience a range of world cultures, faiths and customs. These experiences are reflected in the many high-quality displays of pupils' work in classrooms, corridors and open areas of the school.

- There is highly effective governance and clear lines of accountability through the trust's scheme of delegation to manage the performance of both co-headteachers and the staff. Governors hold you and the staff to account for pupils' outcomes and the school's overall performance.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they sustain the current improvements to early years provision, by:
  - utilising the best practice that exists in the school to provide more challenge for children when they are engaged in self-chosen or independent tasks and activities
  - continuing to improve the achievement of the children, so that more of them reach a good level of development and learn in greater depth.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing board, the chief executive officer of John Taylor Multi-Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I met with both of you throughout the inspection. I also met with four governors, including the chair of the local governing board. We visited most classes together and spoke to pupils, as well as observing their writing in books and on displays. I met with the deputy headteacher, who is also responsible for managing English, and the teacher responsible for managing mathematics.

I spoke to some parents at the start of the day. I considered the 94 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 95 free-text responses sent to Ofsted's regional office. I also considered the six responses from staff to Ofsted's

online questionnaire. I scrutinised the school's improvement plan and leaders' evaluations of the school's work, as well as some minutes of governing body meetings and headteacher reports to governors. I analysed national and school assessment information to consider pupils' attainment and progress. I checked staff vetting and safeguarding procedures with the school's office manager. I also met with both of you to discuss the school's procedures and arrangements for safeguarding pupils.