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Mrs Claire Hardisty  
Headteacher  
Thornbury Primary School  
Miller Way  
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Devon  
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Dear Mrs Hardisty

### **Short inspection of Thornbury Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 25 April 2019 with Matthew Barnes, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in February 2015. The school joined Connect Academy Trust in September 2016.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school is now an academy with Connect Academy Trust (the trust) and has a well-established local governing body. The chief executive officer of the trust knows the school well.

The care you and your staff have taken to establish a good education for all pupils, regardless of background or ability, permeates the school. Inclusion and equality of opportunity are at the heart of Thornbury Primary. Parents are very supportive of the school. In our discussion with a small group of parents, one parent's comment, which replicates many, was: 'The warmth and friendliness of the staff makes such a difference. My child loves school and that is the most important thing to us. Super happy with this school.'

Pupils are a real strength of the school and their behaviour is exemplary. They are highly motivated learners who listen respectfully to each other and to adults. Pupils relish the leadership roles that you provide. They told me that they feel listened to and empowered to make positive changes for the school through the sport, curriculum, eco and e-safety committees. Pupils greatly enjoy school, which is reflected in their good punctuality and attendance.

Governance is highly effective. Governors and the trust have a clear understanding of the effectiveness of the school's work and provide unyielding challenge and

support in equal measure. This is because they visit the school regularly to monitor and check upon leaders' work. They expect and only accept the highest possible standards.

Staff morale is high. This is reflected in the overwhelmingly positive views expressed in their questionnaires. The vast majority of staff who responded to the online survey agree that: they enjoy working at the school; it is well led and managed; and they are proud to be members of the school.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You told me that safeguarding is the school's number one priority. Inspection evidence supports your view. You and your staff have established a culture in which pupils' welfare is paramount. Governors' regular checks on safeguarding strengthen the school's capacity to keep pupils safe. You and your governors arrange for frequent external audits to test the school's safeguarding policy and practice. Any identified actions are diligently followed up by the trust. Consequently, the school's arrangements for safeguarding are fit for purpose.

Staff are properly trained. As a result, staff are attuned to the school's safeguarding systems and processes. They are able to identify the small changes in behaviour or appearance that may indicate that a pupil may be vulnerable or at risk of abuse. Leaders are not afraid to highlight any concerns they may have if they feel that support from outside agencies has not been timely. Almost all parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree that pupils are safe at school.

All pupils who spoke with inspectors are adamant that they are kept safe in school. They say that the curriculum has helped them know how to respond to any concerns that they may have. For example, pupils reported how the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children taught them how to stay safe and recognise different forms of abuse. Pupils spoke with confidence about how adults respond to any concerns they may have. They particularly like how they can use the worry box and the soft toy dogs to support them with any worries or concerns. Pupils understand the difference between bullying and falling out. They are adamant that bullying does not happen and that if it did, teachers would sort it out quickly.

### **Inspection findings**

- At the start of the inspection we agreed some key lines of enquiry. My first line of enquiry focused on how well children are progressing in the early years, particularly boys. This is because, over time, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development has steadily declined. By the end of 2018, the proportion reaching a good level of development fell below the national average. You explained to me how greater proportions of children are now entering the school with skills and knowledge below what would be expected for their age. This is because the school is now providing specialist speech and language

provision. The inward mobility is having a detrimental impact upon your published performance information.

- Nevertheless, when I visited the Reception classrooms, they were calm and productive, with focused children engaging in activities that stimulated their interests and needs. The knowledgeable early years leader has taken a focused approach to improve children's early reading and writing skills. We saw that staff carefully consider the needs of boys, as well as girls, and match the provision so that they make strong progress. Evidence in children's workbooks shows children are making strong progress from their different starting points.
- In my second line of enquiry, I discussed with you what the school has done to raise attainment in reading. This is because in 2018 pupils at the end of key stage 1 did not achieve as well as other pupils nationally, particularly boys. Your precise strategic plans also identified this as an area that required further attention. Leaders have established a strong culture for reading and revitalised the school's approach to reading, specifically targeting the interests of boys. The English leader has shown parents how reading is taught in the school and how to support their children's reading at home. The school invested in a range of new texts to stimulate and motivate boys' interests. Observations of pupils' reading, and the school's accurate assessment records, show that current pupils, including boys, are making strong progress.
- I focused on how secure the teaching of phonics is and what impact this is having on pupils' early reading skills. This is because in 2018 there was a sharp fall in the proportion of pupils in Year 1 reaching the expected standard. Therefore, I wanted to establish how well current pupils are developing the early skills required for reading. Leaders restructured their approach to the teaching of phonics and, where required, put in place suitable training to enhance subject knowledge and skills. Teachers and teaching assistants skilfully apply their knowledge of phonics and current pupils are making strong progress.
- My third line of enquiry concerned mathematics teaching and learning. More recently, leaders established that the mathematics curriculum design required further work. Through working with the local 'maths hub' and collaborating with other schools in the trust, you have modified the curriculum, so it is more effective. However, during the inspection we found that some groups of pupils were not being challenged sufficiently to reach their full potential. A deeper scrutiny of pupils' workbooks also confirmed this. Year 6 pupils who spoke with me also told me that they enjoy mathematics, but do not always feel challenged in some aspects of mathematics.
- Furthermore, you shared with me the school's ongoing work to improve pupils' mathematical reasoning skills. Although this is starting to take shape and have a positive impact upon pupils' outcomes, some pupils still lack the reasoning skills required to problem-solve efficiently. Consequently, this hampers their progress.
- Finally, I wanted to determine how well pupils with special educational needs/and or disabilities (SEND) are progressing across the school. This is because this group of pupils historically have made inconsistent progress. You have established the expectation that all pupils will reach their full potential, regardless of their starting points. Teachers share your high expectations and ensure that

they access the full curriculum and learn well. Additional adults are highly effective in their support in helping pupils overcome their barriers to learning. Pupils are confident to challenge themselves and reach their full potential. As a result, pupils with SEND make good or better progress across the curriculum.

- We also established that pupils who find the concept of problem-solving in mathematics challenging are restricted by varying knowledge and understanding of vocabulary. Although leaders have started to address this across the curriculum, more work is needed to ensure that pupils have a good grasp of age-appropriate vocabulary. This is particularly evident for disadvantaged pupils.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to improve the teaching of mathematics so that all groups of pupils reach their full potential
- they further develop ample opportunities for pupils to develop their reasoning skills and in turn their problem-solving skills in mathematics
- they continue to develop pupils' range of vocabulary, including technical vocabulary, so that it impacts further across the curriculum.

I am copying this letter to chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of Connect Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Plymouth. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Matt Middlemore  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, we held meetings with you, the chief executive officer, senior leaders and five members of the local governing body, including the chair and vice chair. We considered the 34 responses to Parent View, including the free-text comments. We spoke with pupils formally and informally during the day. We also considered the 21 responses to the staff survey, and six responses to the pupil survey. We observed teaching and learning jointly and listened to a sample of pupils read. We looked at a range of pupils' work in their exercise books as well as their work displayed around the school. We scrutinised a range of school documentation, including the single central record, your school self-evaluation and improvement plan.