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Mrs Claire Pearce-King  
St Thomas' Church of England Infant School  
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Berkshire  
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Dear Mrs Pearce-King

### **Subject inspection of St Thomas' Church of England Infant School**

Following my visit to your school on 6 December, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. The findings do not change the overall effectiveness judgement of outstanding from the last section 5 inspection.

This inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for a no formal designation inspection of schools. The inspection was carried out to enable Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to better understand the quality of education in specific subjects provided by outstanding primary schools.

### **Main findings**

Pupils enjoy learning history. They were keen to tell me the factual information they had learned. For example, they could describe some of the changes made over time to the local castle at Highclere. Pupils enjoy experiences outside of the classroom, such as the visit from an astronaut who spoke about the moon landings and the trip to a local care home where pupils talked to the residents about their lives. These link with teaching to develop pupils' understanding of important events and changes over time.

You have made sure that the teaching of history sits securely within your topic-based approach to learning. Pupils are well prepared to begin learning about history in key stage 1, because you ensure that children in the early years gain an understanding of change within their own lifetime. For example, children explore the different things they can do now that they could not do as babies, such as walking

and talking. In key stage 1, you ensure that the breadth of study required by the national curriculum is covered within the topics you teach. For example, pupils learn about key historical figures such as Florence Nightingale as part of the topic, 'Who has helped to make the world a better place?' Pupils develop an understanding of their locality and how things change over time, through learning about the history of the school building and the local village.

Teachers and teaching assistants are skilled in providing extra support and challenge for any pupil who needs it. As a result, all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), have equal access to the history curriculum.

Teachers appreciate the opportunity to plan the content of the topics they teach collaboratively with colleagues. Resources and activities are typically well chosen to support pupils' understanding, including using the school's history resource boxes, which are full of original artefacts. However, occasionally, not enough thought has gone into how activities are sequenced to develop pupils' historical knowledge. For example, pupils posed questions about the history of Highclere Castle, but were not given the opportunity to find out the answers, so limiting their understanding of the concept of historical enquiry.

Pupils' writing about history is very strong. They have lots of opportunities to write factually about history. For example, they described the similarities and differences between telephones over time, explaining how we used to dial numbers and now press or swipe them. They are also starting to write about the importance of events and people. For example, pupils' writing explained that Florence Nightingale was important because she made hospitals cleaner. You also embed pupils' history knowledge, through using history topics as a background to support pupils' understanding of how to structure the English language. For example, pupils used their knowledge of the life of Queen Victoria when learning to use connectives in sentences.

During the inspection, we identified that teachers are teaching much more history than they realise – for example pupils learn about the life of Van Gogh in art and Alexander Bell in technology. Sign-posting this as history-based learning as well as art-based or technology-based learning will help pupils gain historical perspective by placing their growing knowledge into different contexts, such as by understanding aspects of cultural history.

Pupils start to consider chronology through sequencing individual stories and events. However, pupils do not develop a secure understanding of where such events fit within the broader history of our nation and of the world. During the inspection, you reflected that teachers could make better use of timelines to help pupils understand this concept more fully.

You recognise the relative strengths and areas to develop within the history

curriculum. Your school development plan sets out that leaders and teachers need to consider how teachers teach the aims of the national curriculum for history. You recognise that, currently, the key historical concepts, knowledge and terminology that you want pupils to learn are not defined clearly enough. Because of this, teachers cannot be sure that pupils' disciplinary and subject-specific knowledge is being developed securely enough over time. During the inspection, you reflected that being more precise about your expectations of what pupils should know and understand by the time they leave key stage 1 will help teachers when planning the history curriculum at key stage 1 and better prepare pupils for key stage 2 and beyond.

### **Evidence**

During this visit I met with you, other senior leaders, the subject leaders for history and a group of teachers. I visited lessons in the early years and key stage 1. I met with two groups of pupils to talk about their learning in history. I evaluated work in pupils' books. I scrutinised curriculum planning.

### **Context**

St Thomas' Church of England Infant School is a smaller-than-average-sized school. The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is average. The proportion who have SEND is below average. Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well below the national average. Nearly all pupils join the school at the start of the early years and stay until the end of Year 2. Staffing at the school is stable.

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

Yours sincerely

Catherine Old

**Her Majesty's Inspector**