

Inspection of Thurnham Church of England Infant School

The Landway, Bearsted, Maidstone, Kent ME14 4BL

Inspection dates: 21 and 22 February 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

This school was last inspected in 2009 and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are joyful and safe in this nurturing school. Children make a strong start in early years, where the school's exceptional pastoral care begins. Pupils feel special and highly valued. Staff are dedicated to finding unique talents in every pupil.

Expectations are mostly high and often met. Whenever pupils need reminders to move around school with greater care, staff promote positive conduct by celebrating 'Thurnham walking'. Pupils understand the school rules of 'be safe, be ready, be respectful'. Most pupils fulfil these every day. However, some pupils do not show high regard for their environment, and could look after resources more responsibly.

Behaviour is good. Staff provide effective support for pupils who need help to manage their emotions. Pupils work and play happily together. If pupils fall out, staff use 'comic-strip conversations' to help pupils understand what happened. This encourages pupils to learn from mistakes and act with kindness. This approach has helped to ensure that bullying is extremely rare. Any isolated cases are dealt with effectively by leaders.

Everyone loves the wide variety of after-school clubs, run by staff. Pupils are excited about opportunities including street dance, mindfulness, football, yoga, drawing and animal management.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Reading is prioritised in this school. Staff demonstrate expertise when they teach and model phonics. In early years, children show high levels of engagement when learning phonics. Staff identify gaps quickly and know which sounds they need to help pupils practise more. No pupil is left behind. Catch-up sessions are excellent, with strong one-to-one support helping pupils with sounds they find tricky. Pupils read well-matched books to give them the experience they need. Some pupils do not concentrate well when reading in a group. However, pupils progress through the school developing fluency and a love for reading. Teachers promote diversity and equality through well-planned texts.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are thriving. Staff skilfully identify needs, such as dyslexia or sensory issues, and engage positively with parents. Families are thankful for the expertise shared by the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator (SENDCo). This helps them to understand and support their children at home.

Every subject is well planned in the school's ambitious and inclusive curriculum. In the strongest subjects, such as mathematics, history and religious education, pupils engage very well with memorable learning opportunities. As a result, they remember what they have learned and make connections to show good understanding. For example, pupils can talk extensively about the Great Fire of London. Pupils

understand different faiths, and their knowledge of Islam was boosted by links with a local mosque.

Pupils achieve highly in mathematics and reading. Writing is less strong, but leaders recognise this and are already taking effective action. Leaders have not focused enough on some weaker areas of the curriculum. For example, art and design is ambitiously planned but learning is not always effective. Pupils enjoy activities but do not know and remember what they are learning. In computing, pupils are unclear about knowledge and vocabulary. In these less effective subjects, teaching is not always designed to help pupils develop secure knowledge, skills and understanding.

Children in early years learn how to ride bicycles, peel fruit and use tools. Displays are rich with vocabulary and celebrations of learning. Children develop strong motor skills. They enjoy the many opportunities to be creative and to take safe risks. Using strong modelling, staff bring meaningful learning into every area of the well-resourced environment.

Pupils treat each other with kindness around school, and there is a positive learning atmosphere. Many pupils behave brilliantly, but some are less respectful towards adults and property. Leaders recognise that some pupils should show more respect. They are improving outdoor provision to encourage pupils to look after their environment through positive interactions and play.

Pastoral care is impressive. Many parents are grateful to the school for helping their children with issues such as anxiety. Staff show great care, prioritising the physical, emotional and mental health of pupils. Pupils believe that everyone is equal. They are proud to learn about, and celebrate, diversity and difference. Staff showcase pupils' talents and achievements in every class. Leaders work hard to recognise the individual strengths of every pupil.

Governors and interim leaders share an aspirational vision for this warm school community, helping pupils to achieve highly. Most staff feel well supported with workload and with managing behaviour. Parents regard leaders highly and appreciate their dedication. Leaders and governors recognise the school's strengths, but have not identified precisely where specific foundation subjects and elements of behaviour can be better. Governors fulfil their duties and support leaders with a thoughtful approach to well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All staff know what to do if they are worried about any risks to pupils. They have full faith in leaders to follow up any concerns. Leaders keep detailed records, demonstrating effective action to secure help when it is needed. Staff offer strong therapeutic care for pupils. Leaders support families' well-being impressively with clear communication, kindness and flexibility.

Staff update and maintain the single central record with diligence. Recruitment practice meets all requirements, ensuring that all adults are thoroughly vetted.

As a result of well-designed activities in lessons and assemblies, pupils understand how to stay safe online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some foundation subjects, learning activities and key knowledge are not strongly linked. As a result, pupils enjoy activities but do not always know and remember more in subjects such as art and design. Teaching should be designed to help pupils understand and recall knowledge across all areas of the curriculum.
- Pupils are happy and safe, but sometimes the behaviour of some pupils is not highly respectful. This means that some pupils do not show enough regard for property and school routines. Leaders are taking action to address this, and must continue their work to establish expectations for a highly positive and respectful culture across the school.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	118629
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10242348
Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4 to 7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	270
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Sue Jackson
Headteacher	Elizabeth Pateman (Interim)
Website	www.thurnham-infant.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	29 April 2009, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Diocese of Canterbury. The school was rated outstanding in its most recent section 48 inspection, in March 2018.
- The school offers morning and after-school care, led by school staff.
- The current leadership team members are acting as interim leaders.
- The school uses no alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the interim headteacher, the interim deputy headteacher, subject leaders, the SENDCo, teachers and support staff.

- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors studied documents and records, including the school's single central record and child protection referrals. Inspectors spoke with the designated safeguarding lead, staff, governors and pupils.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, art and design, mathematics and religious education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited lessons, spoke to pupils and looked at pupils' work.
- Inspectors also looked at pupils' work in computing and history.
- The lead inspector listened to pupils read and observed catch-up interventions to evaluate how staff provide extra support to pupils.
- The lead inspector met nine members of the local governing body, including the chair of governors.
- Inspectors spoke by telephone with representatives from the local authority and the Diocese of Canterbury.
- Inspectors analysed responses to the staff survey and spoke to staff about their views of the school.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire and the additional free-text responses.
- Inspectors met with a range of pupils to discuss their views about the school, and talked to pupils during social times and in lessons.

Inspection team

Scott Reece, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Catherine Hylands	Ofsted Inspector
Phillip Blagg	His Majesty's Inspector

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