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Mrs Jane Watts
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Watts

Short inspection of Alconbury CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 01 December 2015, 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 2011.

This school continues to be good.

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

As soon as you took up the position of headteacher in September 2015, you galvanised the whole school community to improve the good practice already established at the school. Many parents and staff say that the unique characteristic of this school is best exemplified in the 'Alconbury Family' approach through which everyone is valued and proud of the contributions they are expected to make to the school's success. You quickly gained the trust of staff, set high expectations for the future of the school and are adding your own stamp for a new style of shared leadership.

The school is extremely welcoming. Pupils run in enthusiastically to arrive on time, parents are greeted warmly on arrival and there is a buzz of excitement in classrooms. You are communicating your high expectations for conduct around the school and in lessons very effectively. As a result, the school is calm and orderly. There is a studious environment in which pupils thrive. Pupils say that they love their school because:

- everyone gets on well with one another
- they know exactly what is expected of them
- they learn a lot

- they want to be in lessons because they are interesting.

This inspection confirms the views of pupils. Their attitudes to learning are excellent. Consequently, they make good progress.

The school provides very well for pupils' personal development, particularly in improving their understanding of diversity and in developing their respect for the views of others. The link between the school's Christian ethos and British values is actively promoted. The pupils I spoke with were exceptionally clever at explaining how these important beliefs and principles complement one another to underpin their learning and behaviour.

All staff encourage pupils to do the very best they can, right from the time they start in Reception. They are given many opportunities to excel through academic, artistic and sporting events. The vibrant curriculum, the wide range of extra-curricular activities and interesting guest speakers bring learning to life.

Senior leaders ensure that pupils who need help, particularly when they face challenges in their life, are supported promptly and sensitively. Your accurate tracking of pupils' progress and robust monitoring of teaching and assessment ensure that additional interventions are effective. The dedication of teaching assistants, which enable pupils to engage in their learning, is exemplary.

At the previous inspection, inspectors recommended that leaders took action to improve pupils' multicultural awareness and to extend the learning opportunities for gifted and talented pupils. Your leadership team and governors have successfully tackled these areas and now:

- pupils are very clear about the varied cultures, religions and traditions in modern Britain
- pupils can explain why people have different beliefs and make different choices in their lives
- opportunities to visit places that are different to pupils' local area, are numerous
- the 'High Achieving Learners' (HAL) initiative and good tracking system ensure that more-able pupils make accelerated progress.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff are extremely vigilant. The strong sense of community, the commitment to supporting others and the staff's understanding of the school's procedures and policies ensure that pupils are safe. They say that they feel safe when they are at school. Senior leaders are approachable and highly visible around the school; parents and pupils know that any concerns they have will be addressed promptly.

Safeguarding arrangements are robust. All staff have had relevant training. The school works well with external agencies to secure effective support for pupils. You, in particular, go the extra mile to ensure that families in need of intensive support

are helped so that their children's education does not suffer at times of crisis.

Inspection findings

- You have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas that need further improvement. Governors are highly knowledgeable and bring a wealth of expertise to the school. Because you provide the governing body with a clear analysis of assessment information, governors are very effective in holding the school to account. They use this information well to improve outcomes, although some boys still do less well than girls in reading and writing.
- The experienced Key Stage 2 leader, and the school's new deputy headteacher, complement your own qualities and style. As a senior team, you are rightly focusing on coaching and mentoring the teachers who are new to the school. You are managing this well, because, although half of the teachers started to work at the school in September 2015, policies and procedures are applied well. The leadership of subjects is not yet fully effective because some subject leaders are new to their role and not all are confident in their monitoring and evaluation of teaching, learning and assessment. Your ambition to make the school outstanding requires that they develop their expertise to ensure that teaching and learning are of the highest quality across all subjects.
- The positive impact of leadership is particularly visible in phonics, spelling and punctuation. Leaders identified some weaknesses, developed a clear plan of action, provided relevant training and focused relentlessly on raising standards in these areas. As a result, outcomes are much improved and are now well above average.
- You have identified the teaching and learning of mathematics as a strength of the school. This inspection confirms that this subject is taught well. During this visit, pupils were highly motivated in their numeracy lessons. All, regardless of their ability, concentrated on their work. More-able pupils in Year 6, for example, were making rapid progress.
- Your improvement plan is fit for purpose and supports your aims for the school well. You have set ambitious targets and clear actions to make sure that pupils' outcomes are above the national expectation as soon as possible. You are ensuring that children in Reception get off to a flying start. The strategies identified in your plan for early years, such as robust baseline assessment and targeted prompt intervention, ensure that the proportion of children reaching a good level of development is well above average. This means that children are well prepared to start Year 1.
- Pupils respond very positively to the high expectations for conduct around the school and for learning in class or on educational outings. Bullying is rare and taken very seriously. Pupils want to attend school and attendance is above average. Pupils are very proud of the school and are keen to take on responsibilities. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is

a strength.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- subject leaders develop their monitoring and evaluation skills so they can improve pupils' learning and outcomes across all curriculum areas
- accelerate the rates of progress that boys make in reading and writing so that they attain higher levels at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Ely, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Marianick Ellender-Gelé
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, your senior leaders and seven governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. I also met with a representative from the local authority. I met a group of pupils and spoke to many during breaktime. We visited classes together and I checked your evaluation of teaching and learning at the school. I looked at pupils' work and talked to them about their learning. I analysed recent assessment information about pupils' progress. I reviewed records and procedures about keeping pupils safe and about attendance and punctuality. I considered the views of 88 parents from Parent View and took account of 54 additional comments from parents. I also spoke to many parents at the beginning of the school day, at the coffee morning for new parents and met individual parents who asked to speak with me during the day. I also took account of a letter from a member of the local community. I analysed questionnaire responses from 25 members of staff.