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Ms S Awuye
Headteacher
St Philip and James' Church of England Aided Primary School
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Oxford
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Dear Ms Awuye

Short inspection of St Philip and James' Church of England Aided Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 08 February 2018, 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 October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment in September 2017, you have relentlessly focused on raising standards, particularly in writing, and improving the quality of teaching. Following your appointment, you recognised astutely, even before you took up your post, that standards in writing were not as good as they should be. Over time, pupils achieve well in reading and mathematics by the end of Year 6, but pupils' writing skills have lagged behind. In the last six months, pupils' progress in writing has begun to improve. However, there is much more to be done to enable more pupils to achieve the expected standard and for the most able pupils to reach the higher standard by the time they leave the school at the end of Year 6.

Governors recognised that in the past they did not have a detailed understanding of the issues facing the school. Following the retirement of the previous headteacher, governors carried out a rigorous recruitment process. They knew that a high-calibre appointment was required to ensure that the challenges facing the school were tackled and addressed effectively. Governors are fully committed to ensuring that all pupils are provided with the best possible opportunities to fulfil their potential, whatever their starting point.

School leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Together with the governing body, you have set out the most important areas for improvement in the school development and improvement plan. This includes making sure teaching is consistently good, as recommended at the school's

previous inspection. Governors welcome your open and honest approach, and the exchange of accurate information provided, to enable them to challenge and support you and your staff team effectively.

You know that pupils' phonics skills have not been strong enough by the end of Year 1 and for some pupils at the end of Year 2. Although standards have improved, they were below the national average for the last three years. You have introduced a new approach to the teaching of phonics, which is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' ability to blend sounds together to spell and read words correctly. You know that there is more to be done to make sure that pupils are provided with the skills they need to develop effective early reading skills.

Children begin school in the Reception classes with skills and abilities that are typical for their age, and some have very well-developed skills and abilities. However, in the past, not enough children were prepared well for learning at the start of Year 1. Together with your early years leaders, you have set out clear strategies to ensure that children's next steps in learning are identified. This enables all adults to shape learning experiences to make sure that children make consistently strong progress. This is beginning to have a positive effect, but there is still more to do to make sure that more children are prepared well for learning when they begin in Year 1.

You have rightly recognised that the skills of middle leaders have not been developed well enough in the past. Many are new to their role, but you are making effective use of your assistant headteachers' skills to support and develop the skills of your middle leaders. This is essential work and needs to continue to develop so that emerging leaders have even more opportunities to support and influence continued improvement.

Pupils are very positive about the learning opportunities that are provided, both during the school day and in the clubs and activities that take place after school. The wide range of sporting activities include football, hockey, cricket, tennis and netball. Pupils also talked enthusiastically about the cooking club. Pupils are happy to come to school, which is reflected in their good attendance. You have successfully reduced the absence rates of the few disadvantaged pupils whose attendance was a cause for concern in the past.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils say that they feel safe and are taught how to keep themselves safe through a range of activities and visits. Visitors provide additional guidance on keeping safe at home and in the community. Older pupils learn to keep safe on the roads when riding their bicycles and have the opportunity to take part in Bikeability training. Pupils know that the regular fire drills and lockdown procedures are designed to make sure that they know what to do in an emergency. Pupils say that adults listen to them if they have any concerns and are confident that adults will deal with any issues that may arise.

School leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. You made some important changes and improvements as soon as you took up your post to assure the safety and well-being of pupils. Staff are acutely aware of their responsibilities to protect pupils from harm. Leaders ensure that their policies and practice are in line with current legislation and that they are consistently applied by staff. Leaders respond quickly to concerns and record detailed information to enable them to provide effective support for pupils and their families.

Thorough checks are made on adults when they work or volunteer at the school. All staff have completed appropriate training and you make sure that safeguarding updates are provided for all staff regularly.

Inspection findings

- You have raised expectations and convey a clear message to all staff that pupils can and should achieve well. This has been a challenge for some staff, but, overall, those who completed the staff questionnaire are positive about the improvements that are being made. They know that professional development is being used well to increase their skills so that their teaching improves and is consistently strong. Middle leaders are starting to play a greater part in supporting their colleagues to improve.
- In consultation and agreement with the governing body, you have introduced a new approach for assessing pupils' achievement. Although this is relatively new to the teaching staff, they are using the information well to plan pupils' next steps in learning. Governors are very positive about this new system because they are able to monitor the progress of different groups of pupils more effectively. This has increased their ability to check whether the strategies set out in the school development and improvement plan are successful.
- Teachers are planning writing activities that are better suited to the learning needs of pupils of differing abilities. This is having a positive effective on the progress that they are making. Pupils demonstrate their breadth of knowledge and many write with interesting and expressive vocabulary. However, pupils are not routinely expected to write at length. There is room for more improvement in the quality of some pupils' writing. Some pupils are not presenting their work consistently well. Some have not yet developed effective spelling skills and some are not accurately punctuating their work. These writing skills are vital to ensuring that pupils achieve the standards expected for their age and that the most able pupils do as well as they should.
- The new approach to the teaching of phonics is helping pupils to use their phonics knowledge more effectively. Pupils are more successful now in blending sounds together to spell words. In one phonics session, pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, were using their knowledge of phonemes to build words such as 'dish' and 'ship'. They then were able to independently write a number of words using the new phoneme 'ay' that they were learning. You rightly plan to strengthen phonics teaching further.
- Children in the early years are beginning to make better progress, particularly in

writing. This is because teachers plan more opportunities for children to talk about stories and use their knowledge and vocabulary to vocally express their thinking. Children were enthusiastic about a story about animals crossing a river. They were able to use their knowledge to describe animal movements and develop a story verbally together. You intend to build on this to ensure that children are well prepared for Year 1.

- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. A very large majority would recommend the school to other parents. Many who completed written responses to the online questionnaire Parent View are very happy about the positive improvements in recent months. One parent's comment reflected the views of many: 'There have been some thoughtful and beneficial changes in a relatively short time.' Another captured the improvements by saying: 'The school has improved in terms of governance, leadership, communication and ambition.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- children in the early years make at least good progress to ensure that a higher proportion are well prepared for learning at the start of Year 1
- the early reading skills of pupils in Years 1 and 2 improve so that they are better prepared to use their phonics knowledge to tackle unfamiliar words and to support their writing more effectively
- pupils' progress in writing accelerates across the school, so that those who have underachieved in the past catch up, and a higher proportion of the most able pupils reach the higher standards
- the skills of middle leaders are developed effectively to enable them to take a full part in raising standards and bringing about improvement in their areas of responsibility.

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

Yours sincerely

Ann Henderson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, your two assistant headteachers, one of your English subject leaders, the chair of governors and two governors, your school business manager and a group of pupils. I had telephone conversations with representatives of the local authority and of the Diocese of Oxford. I scrutinised a range of documents, including information on pupils' achievement, the school's self-evaluation and school development and improvement plan, external reports and documentation relating to safeguarding. Pupils' progress in their learning over time was checked by looking at their work in books. Together we observed pupils' learning, including two phonics sessions.