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Ms Amy Graham
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Dear Ms Graham

Short inspection of Oulton CofE (C) First School

Following my visit to the school on 5 March 2019, 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 predecessor 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. The school joined The Key Educational Trust (the trust) in April 2016. Since then the head of school, in partnership with the trust, has created an industrious and purposeful learning environment for pupils and staff.

You and the staff have developed a warm and caring ethos. Relationships between adults and pupils are very positive. Leaders lead by example. They have high expectations of pupils and have ensured that the school's rules are embedded in its Christian ethos. Pupils are happy and enjoy coming to school. They behave very well in class and around the school. They are polite, respectful and considerate. Pupils play happily and safely during social time. Parents and carers who spoke with me said that they are proud of the school and value its role within the local village community.

Pupils achieve well. Over time, their attainment has been above the national average. Children's attainment at the end of the early years foundation stage is high, and the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics check by the end of Year 2 is high and improving over time. The attainment of the most able pupils in reading and writing is well above the national average.

The head of school, who leads mathematics, has introduced a new approach to teaching mathematics. This approach gives pupils more opportunities to apply their reasoning skills and solve problems. Pupils spend more time in lessons working with

practical resources that help them understand mathematical concepts. Pupils know that teachers expect a verbalised or written sentence to explain their thinking and reasoning. As a result, they make good progress in mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The head of school and other designated safeguarding leads take their roles seriously and keep up to date with statutory guidelines. Leaders respond appropriately to concerns raised by staff and make timely referrals to external agencies when necessary. There is a positive culture for keeping pupils safe.

Leaders and staff know pupils and their families well. They are alert to any changes in pupils' appearance or behaviour and communicate openly with parents to build a picture of pupils' individual circumstances. Staff training is effective and ensures that all have a good awareness of their responsibilities. As a result, staff know the process to follow should they have concerns about a child's safety or welfare. However, leaders need to ensure consistency in the recording of child protection concerns by making sure that all staff use the specified concerns form in the current child-protection policy.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. The curriculum includes many opportunities to learn about possible risks of harm. Pupils are clear about the dangers associated with the internet and know how important it is to tell an adult if they are concerned about something. During a recent visit from the fire service, pupils learned about fire hazards in the home and the job of a firefighter. All parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their children feel safe at school and that staff look after them well.

Inspection findings

- The first focus for this inspection was to explore how effectively leaders have improved teaching and extended opportunities for pupils to solve problems in mathematics and to study independently in lessons. This was an area of development from the previous inspection. Staff have received training to improve their subject knowledge and skills, particularly in mathematics, reading, including phonics, and writing. Teachers apply this knowledge routinely and effectively in lessons. Consequently, pupils have more opportunities to solve problems and apply their independent study skills, and their progress is improving.
- Lessons are well organised and resourced. Pupils have a range of opportunities to work independently and collaboratively. Pupils are well motivated and get on with the tasks set. They use a range of strategies to work on their own as well as supporting each other, and only seek help from adults when these strategies have been exhausted.
- The quality of teaching is improving and there are examples of some very strong practice. Tasks are very closely matched to pupils' needs and abilities. Leaders

hold regular meetings with teachers to discuss the progress that pupils are making. These reviews ensure that targeted and timely interventions are in place for pupils who need to catch up and that all pupils are challenged to do well. Teachers have few opportunities to share their practice with colleagues or learn from one another. Leaders acknowledge that they do not yet make full use of the expertise that exists in the school and across the trust.

- The second area I explored was to check how well governors hold leaders to account for the school's performance, including the impact of additional funding. Governors are committed to, and supportive of, the school. They receive regular reports from the executive headteacher and, as a result, have a broad understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Following changes in the governing body, a number of new governors have only recently received induction and training. They have not yet developed the skills and depth of understanding to challenge leaders with rigour. New governors, understandably, rely on the executive headteacher's reports. However, some of the information they receive does not focus closely enough on the impact of leaders' actions on improving pupils' progress.
- The school has a smaller proportion of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) than is typical nationally. Leaders ensure that additional funding is spent appropriately. School leaders ensure that pupils' needs are met in lessons and through additional support. However, leaders have not made sure that evaluations of impact of the pupil premium and the physical education (PE) and sport premium funding are sufficiently detailed. As a result, they cannot identify which strategies have the most impact and why.
- The third area of focus was how effectively leaders plan a curriculum that is sufficiently broad and balanced and ensures that there is enough challenge for pupils. There are a wide range of opportunities for pupils to learn through a well-planned curriculum. The curriculum is based effectively upon pupils' needs and abilities. Teachers plan lessons using a thematic approach in order to maximise opportunities for pupils to apply their reading, writing and mathematics in other subjects and topics where possible. Pupils enjoy this approach and say that 'learning is fun.' Pupils achieve well and make strong progress due to the rich and exciting curriculum. Work in pupils' books is detailed, presented well and shows how much they have learned.
- As a result of leaders' work on improving reading, pupils in all year groups develop a love of reading and talk enthusiastically about the books and stories they read. Pupils enjoy reading stories written by their favourite authors, including Roald Dahl and Julia Donaldson. They read with confidence and fluency. Year 2 pupils enjoy composing questions about books they have read, such as 'What was Mr Wormwood's excuse for not buying Matilda a book?'
- Parents and pupils appreciate the broad range of enrichment opportunities that are available. The forest school and music lessons are particular favourites. Pupils are proud of their school choir and are complimentary about the many opportunities they have to attend community events. They enjoy the range of activities available after school, such as dodge ball and eco-school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- governors receive accurate reports and information that enable them to hold leaders to account more effectively
- they evaluate more closely the impact of the spending of additional funding so that they know which strategies have a positive impact on pupils' outcomes and which do not
- teachers have regular opportunities to share best practice.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Lichfield, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lorraine Lord
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held a meeting with you and the head of school. I met with the chair of governors and the chief executive officer of The Key Educational Trust. I spoke to pupils. I made short visits to six lessons and looked at books from a range of pupils. I spoke to parents at the start of the day and considered 22 free-text responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also considered the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff.