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Mr Jonathan Moore  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Moore

### **Short inspection of Aston Tower Community Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 19 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 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.

You provide strong leadership and have high expectations for the school community. Parents appreciate how visible and supportive you are. Leaders and staff have worked successfully to create an inclusive school community. Pupils' wide-ranging cultural backgrounds are brought together cohesively. The school roll can fluctuate considerably. Sometimes, pupils enter in different year groups having moved from overseas or from other schools. You and the staff put in place good quality personal and academic support, so that pupils succeed. There is a sense of togetherness among pupils, parents and staff. Many parents commented on how well supported and welcomed they are. Typical comments included, 'The headteacher and other staff are very supportive – this school feels like a family.'

You and the leadership team are reflective and forward thinking. If weaknesses arise in pupils' outcomes, you identify actions required and make successful improvements. For example, you identified that disadvantaged children were not achieving as well as they could in Reception. This group of children now receive more focused support and their attainment has risen considerably. Across the whole school, you have introduced a determined and precise focus on supporting disadvantaged pupils. This is proving successful because disadvantaged pupils make good progress on their journey through school.

This inspection is the first inspection since the school converted to become an academy. The previous inspection was seven years ago and a lot of changes have taken place at the school since that time. You have successfully addressed some of the areas for improvement from that inspection. Early years provision has become a strength and is a phase of the school that is really appreciated by parents. The teaching of mathematics has improved. Pupils are confident and accurate when adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing, including when using fractions. However, pupils receive limited high-quality opportunities to apply their mathematical skills through reasoning problems.

Writing is taught well and is given a high priority across the school. Pupils' high standards and pride in their work are reflected well in the writing displays around the school. Teachers skilfully plan opportunities for pupils to write at length in English lessons and across other subject areas. Pupils' books reflect the fact that their writing skills develop very well over time. In recent years, a successful focus on language development has helped pupils to develop a broader range of vocabulary. This has benefited all pupils, but particularly the large number of pupils who speak English as an additional language.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and behave well in lessons and at social times. They are very respectful and accepting of one another. You have worked sensitively with pupils to deepen their understanding of British values. Staff make good use of role models to exemplify personal values and qualities. This work is paying off because pupils have increasingly mature and sensible attitudes to the world around them. They speak knowledgeably about tolerance and how it is important to accept others' cultural backgrounds and religions. Comments from pupils included, 'you should treat others as you want to be treated' and 'People might have different backgrounds or religions, but it is important to accept them for who they are.'

Pupils' personal development is well considered. They really enjoy the wide range of sports clubs and other clubs that they can access after school and at lunchtime. During this academic year some year groups have been on several curriculum trips, while some year groups have not been on any. Some pupils said they would appreciate more curriculum trips.

You have worked very well to develop good partnerships with parents. Several parents commented on how well they were integrated into the school community. This is particularly the case for those parents who move from other schools or come to England from overseas for the first time. Strategies such as open classroom sessions also help parents to see the sort of learning that takes place in classrooms.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The arrangements for safeguarding are fit for purpose. You and other designated safeguarding leads are very good at identifying potential risks that may be relevant in the community that you serve. Staff training is matched well to these risks and, as a result, staff have a good understanding of safeguarding risks. Leaders also check staff's understanding of safeguarding on a regular basis. The systems for

recording and managing concerns are well organised and thorough. Staff are clear about their responsibilities and act quickly if they need to pass information on to leaders. Leaders follow up concerns robustly and make referrals to the local authority in a timely way. The culture for safeguarding is strong.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. You and the staff take opportunities to teach pupils about relevant risks and do not shy away from important issues. For example, recently, the police came to talk to be pupils about the dangers associated with knife crime and gang culture. Pupils spoke knowledgeably about how this has helped their understanding. Other aspects of safety are well taught. Pupils are clear about the dangers of the internet and how important it is to tell a trusted adult if they are concerned about something online.

### **Inspection findings**

- Children get off to an excellent start in the early years. Staff have high expectations and positive relationships with children. This was typified by the phonics teaching seen in Reception during the inspection. Staff used secure subject knowledge and interesting activities to ensure that children made progress in the session. Children confidently applied newly learned sounds into their writing.
- There is a strong sense of teamwork among staff in the early years. Assessment information is used well to plan learning that both challenges and stimulates children's interest. Children often enter Nursery with skills and understanding below those typical for their age. Over the last three years, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of Reception has been above the national average.
- In 2018, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check was well below the national average. You made it clear in your self-evaluation that some pupils in Year 1 did not receive consistently good teaching last academic year. Phonics subject knowledge is not consistently strong among all staff. You have started to share the good practice that exists in the school with other staff. However, this has not yet ensured that all phonics teaching is of a consistently high standard.
- You have put in place an impressive approach to the teaching of reading. In 2016 and 2017, reading attainment at the end of key stage 2 was not high enough. However, your new strategies are proving very successful and attainment is rising. Teachers find regular opportunities to immerse pupils in high-quality literature. Pupils are motivated to read widely and proudly talk about their favourite authors such as Michael Morpurgo and Roald Dahl. There has been a good focus on comprehension to develop pupils' understanding of language, inference and prediction.
- The development of the curriculum is one of the whole-school priorities and some good work has started to develop certain subjects. Staff are enthusiastic about teaching the wider curriculum subjects and pupils enjoy the learning that takes place. The quality of work in pupils' books in science and history is a noticeable strength. In science, pupils carry out investigative work and evaluate their

findings with increasing skill as they move through school. Pupils really enjoy their Mandarin lessons and learning to play different instruments through the music curriculum.

- There is still some work to do to ensure that the quality of the curriculum delivery is consistently strong across the range of foundation subjects. Occasionally, in some year groups and in some subjects, pupils' knowledge and understanding does not develop as well as it should. For example, in geography and art sometimes the work that is intended in the curriculum plans does not get delivered in practice.
- You have put a positive focus on the development of the leadership team. Senior and middle leaders have a positive impact in their areas of responsibility. A good example of this impact is the improvement in attendance rates. Over the last two years, overall pupil absence has reduced significantly and persistent absence is now below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils on the special educational needs register is above the national average. The special educational needs coordinator has effective systems for identifying and supporting pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils with complex needs are well catered for and external agencies are used proactively to provide specialist advice.
- The trust board members are committed, skilled and knowledgeable. They have a good understanding of how their role has changed since moving from a governing structure to trust board. Members are proactive and provide leaders with an appropriate level of challenge and support.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide high-quality opportunities to develop pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics
- they continue to share good practice that exists in the teaching of phonics, so that all phonics delivery is of a consistently high standard
- they build on the positive aspects of the school's curriculum, so that pupils' knowledge and understanding develops consistently well across the full range of foundation subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Matt Meckin  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and several other leaders. I met with four trustees and spoke to the school improvement adviser on the telephone. I spoke to pupils informally and formally. I made short visits to 10 lessons and looked at a range of pupils' books. I spoke to parents at the start of the day and considered the free-text responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also considered 20 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire.