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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 4 June 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 second 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.

You and your staff provide a stimulating, welcoming environment in which pupils feel secure and inspired to learn. Pupils take pride in their work and are proud of the school. They benefit from an exciting curriculum which develops their enjoyment of learning. Staff are equally proud to work at the school. Morale is extremely high as staff feel well supported and valued.

You and your deputy headteacher form a dedicated senior leadership team. Together, you strive to cultivate pupils' academic, emotional, social and personal development. You and your governors know what the school does well and what you want to be even better. You set appropriate priorities and governors are robust in checking that actions have been taken and are having the desired impact. This ensures that the school continues to improve. Knowledgeable governors provide an appropriate balance of support and challenge. This gives the school good capacity for future improvement.

Parents and carers are highly supportive of the school. The many parents who provided responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, indicated that they would recommend the school. Numerous comments from parents reflected the caring 'Alconbury family' ethos of the school. Many parents indicated the following sentiments:

'The school is a huge part of our village community. All staff care about the pupils, not just their academic learning, but the whole child. They help create happy, rounded children, and even care about those who have long flown their nest.'

Adults in the school's community have made successful bids for a variety of grants to enhance the school environment. Staff have built up good relationships with the local community. For example, the wooden outdoor play equipment, chosen by the pupils, was made by local college students.

Pupils are well mannered and friendly. They talk about the importance of being respectful to each other and the need to 'share, care and play fair'. They behave well, both around the school and when they are learning. They are eager learners who listen respectfully to each other and to adults. They settle into their activities quickly and confidently.

There has been a sustained focus on improving teaching and learning. Adults' effective questioning is deepening pupils' thinking and supporting their achievements throughout the school. The progress that Year 6 pupils make from the end of key stage 1 to the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics is above the national average. Consequently, at the end of their primary school experience, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Currently, leaders at all levels are reviewing the curriculum for all year groups within a two-year rolling programme. This is to ensure that there is clear progression in pupils' learning and skills so that they make strong progress from their various starting points.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You and the deputy headteacher, as the school's designated safeguarding leaders, ensure that the school has effective procedures so that pupils are safe at all times. Together with governors, you complete all the necessary checks thoroughly to guarantee that adults are suitable to work with pupils. Staff and volunteers receive appropriate and regular safeguarding training. Governors check that all necessary documentation is of the highest quality and safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Pupils learn about staying safe within school, in the community and when working online. They understand the difference between bullying and teasing, and state neither happen often. When incidents occur, pupils are confident that their concerns will be resolved quickly.

### **Inspection findings**

- To check whether the school remains good, I followed several lines of enquiry. The first explored the progress pupils make in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 1. I wanted to check if this is as strong as that made by Year 6 pupils from the end of Year 2. At the same time, I investigated whether there are

any differences between the achievements of boys and girls across the whole school. This was highlighted during the previous inspection.

- Evidence in pupils' books and high-quality displays, combined with the school's teacher assessments, indicate that most pupils are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics in both key stages 1 and 2 from their starting points in September. Staff quickly identify any gaps between groups, including between boys and girls. They provide appropriate support, in a timely manner, to diminish differences.
- Leaders and teachers have secure subject knowledge and are using a variety of new strategies to improve teaching. In mathematics across the school, pupils use appropriate vocabulary and resources to support their learning. For example, key stage 2 pupils accurately measured angles and discussed how to calculate missing angles in a straight line. They could identify whether they were acute or obtuse. Key stage 1 pupils used apparatus to calculate various ways to make a given number. In both cases, staff supported pupils well, where required, and challenged the most able pupils sufficiently.
- Reading and discussing high-quality texts, and writing for a purpose, are improving pupils' comprehension, vocabulary, grammar and punctuation skills. Interesting activities are engaging boys and girls. For example, Year 6 pupils had written high-quality letters to various football clubs and were delighted with the signed photographs and programmes they had received. Key stage 1 pupils enthusiastically read and acted out a class story map. This gave them many ideas for their individual writing.
- My next focus was to investigate teaching and learning in the early years. This is because the proportion of children meeting the expected standard of a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year is not increasing over time.
- Attainment on entry varies each year, with more children lacking basic skills, especially those of communication and language. The experienced early years leader is continuously improving provision for the Reception children, both inside and outside, to meet their various needs. Effective questioning from adults improves children's speaking and listening skills quickly.
- Staff provide many exciting activities for children to develop their skills and knowledge in all areas of learning. For example, children enjoyed stimulating activities around the traditional tale of 'Jack and the Beanstalk'. After listening to an associated story, they dressed up in wigs and large glasses, similar to the giant, and drew high-quality portraits with appropriate labels. Children's writing on the leaves of a giant beanstalk showed they could use their phonological knowledge appropriately to help them spell difficult words. They showed good attitudes to learning and focused concentration throughout their tasks. Children also use their knowledge of phonics to support their reading.
- Teachers' assessment of children's starting points, and the progress they make throughout the year, is rigorous and accurate. This evidence, combined with children's work, shows that they are making good progress from their starting points. Children are well prepared for their learning in Year 1.
- My final line of enquiry was to investigate the work of the subject leaders, which

was an area for improvement from the previous inspection. Senior leaders are providing effective training and support to build up an enthusiastic, knowledgeable subject leadership team.

- Subject leaders model new teaching strategies well to support other staff to improve teaching and learning. They produce appropriate plans to raise the profile and improve pupils' outcomes in their area of responsibility. Through the use of new 'knowledge organisers', subject leaders provide teachers with well-sequenced lessons for a 'block' of work. These support pupils' progression of skills throughout the school. Additionally, they provide effective cross-curricular links and help to develop appropriate subject-specific vocabulary. Subject leaders ensure that teachers accurately identify underachievers and the most able pupils so that they receive the appropriate support or challenge. The evaluation of this work across the curriculum is in the early stages of implementation.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to robustly evaluate and develop the school's curriculum to ensure that pupils make the best possible progress from their various starting points.

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. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Julie Harrison  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, senior and middle leaders, governors, the school's improvement partner and a representative from the diocese. I spoke to a group of pupils. I looked at a range of documentation, including information about the school's self-evaluation and plans for future improvement. Additionally, I examined policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils, including the school's single central record of pre-employment checks on staff. I visited all classrooms in the school with either yourself or the deputy headteacher to observe pupils' learning and scrutinise the work in pupils' books. I took account of the views of 109 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, together with the written views of 73 parents from the free-text service. I also looked at the online questionnaire responses from 18 staff members.