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Mrs Fiona Taylor
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Dear Mrs Taylor

Short inspection of Aston and Cote Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 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 June 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have worked at the school for over 25 years and your experience and commitment to pupils shines through. In September 2017, following the previous headteacher's departure, you skilfully stepped up to the role of acting headteacher. You have made a confident start to leading the school, establishing your high expectations, and in doing so, demonstrating a comprehensive grasp of what the school could do even better. You are not daunted by your temporary position nor the greater responsibility it carries. Furthermore, you are not afraid of making changes for the better. You have ensured that staff are positioned wisely, determined to reap the benefits that are gained when staff are working to their strengths. One parent encapsulated the views of others, praising the school's 'positive and progressive outlook'.

The school is in capable hands, as you understand the needs of staff, the community and pupils so well. Consequently, you are able to identify precisely the key priorities, which are reflected well in the school's improvement plan. Nevertheless, we agreed that the plan would benefit from tighter, measurable success criteria. This will enable you and your governors to evaluate more sharply the difference your actions are making.

Governors share your high level of commitment to the pupils of Aston and Cote. The quality of governance has strengthened since the previous inspection, an aspect the school was asked to develop. Governors responded wholeheartedly to this steer, working diligently to improve their skills and expertise. Voluntarily, they

commissioned a thorough review of their work and in doing so, demonstrated their full commitment to supporting the school's leaders well. Consequently, this aspect has strengthened. Governors are now fully immersed in monitoring the school's effectiveness, wisely aligning their monitoring activities to the school's improvement priorities. This is helpful to you. Nevertheless, you and your governors acknowledge that the school's website needs revitalising so that it complies with the Department for Education's regulations.

The school's communication with parents and carers has improved, an area that required development at the last inspection. You have successfully generated a strong community spirit, where getting along well with each other is celebrated and learning securely is revered. Pupils radiate confidence, self-assurance and enjoyment of learning. They have only positive things to say about their school, the exciting curriculum and their teachers, whom they describe as top notch. Parents, too, are appreciative, citing strong communication, excellent support for pupils, the friendliness of staff and the school's rich curriculum as some of the many strengths of your small, community-based school. One noted: 'Aston and Cote is a fantastic school, my son is always happy to go to school and loves the school environment. The teachers are brilliant and are a very strong team. It's a great school.' Parental support has strengthened considerably in recent times. Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Parent View, confirmed the school's popularity, with 98% of parents stating that they would recommend the school. The proportion has risen since the last inspection.

At the last inspection, inspectors identified strengths in the teaching of reading. This has been maintained. The teaching of phonics is first rate. Teachers are very skilled and hold the highest expectations of their pupils. In turn, pupils listen hard, try their best and quickly gain the skills needed for success. In 2016 and in 2017, all Year 1 pupils met the standard required in the Year 1 phonics screening check. Such strong outcomes exemplify the many strengths in the school's approach to the teaching of early reading skills.

At the time of the last inspection, leaders were asked to strengthen the quality of teaching in order to raise pupils' achievement further. Pupils' achievement rose in 2017, with more pupils attaining the standard expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics in both key stages 1 and 2. Standards are either in line with, or above those seen nationally. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, including children in the early years, who make good, and sometimes rapid progress from their starting points. Nevertheless, too few of the most able pupils exceed the standard expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. Increasing the level of challenge for pupils is an area that the school is beginning to make good headway in developing.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's safeguarding policy is kept under regular review and meets requirements. Leaders ensure that all pre-employment checks, including those that relate to staff from overseas, are conducted, with details recorded accurately on the

school's single central record. Leaders are assured that all staff, volunteers and visitors regardless of their role, are safe to work with pupils. Governors, too, play their part, undertaking safer recruitment training to ensure that they have the necessary up-to-date knowledge to carry out their responsibilities thoroughly. The school has well-developed contingency plans in case of leaders' absence, as several staff have been trained to the highest level and are therefore able to act as the designated safeguarding lead. The school keeps clear records and follows up on any areas of concern immediately.

Pupils feel safe, secure and confident that adults look after them well. They are comforted by the lengths that adults go to ensure that the school's site is a safe place to be, such as keeping the school's gates locked and secure throughout the working day. Pupils also know how to keep themselves safe online. As part of internet safety day, pupils in Years 4 and 5 were able to describe the importance of leaving a positive digital footprint online. In addition, the school's website promotes helpful information to parents about keeping their children safe online, including that published by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command (CEOP).

Pupils are unanimous that the school does not have bullying. They are confident that if ever such an issue should arise, their teachers would resolve it effectively. Strong friendships exist both across and between different year groups. Positive relationships form the cornerstone of pupils' optimistic outlook at Aston and Cote Church of England Primary School. One pupil, drawing on personal experience, proudly commented that when pupils join the school, 'They don't have to worry about fitting in. They can jump straight in and instantly have friends.'

Inspection findings

- During this inspection, we looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision, including: the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements; the achievement of the most able pupils; the achievement of pupils in reading; the quality of the school's curriculum; and the effectiveness of leaders and governors in driving improvement and promoting parental engagement.
- Children achieve well in the early years. Most gain the skills and understanding required to enable a good start to Year 1. Some exceed the early learning goals, particularly in reading and writing at the end of their Reception Year. Older pupils respond well to the high level of challenge in lessons, including in subjects like science. Pupils are strongly motivated by their experiences in school and told the inspector that learning is challenging because 'You can always improve.' More pupils are beginning to work at greater depth than in the past, particularly in reading and writing.
- Pupils get off to a great start in developing their early reading skills as the teaching of reading is highly effective. Good-quality training has ensured that teachers are adept at modelling sounds. Young pupils, including children in the early years, gain huge satisfaction from applying their understanding of phonemes to sound out and spell tricky words, such as 'conspire'.
- Older pupils talk positively about the difference that mastering the ability to read

well makes, commenting that 'Reading is the key to everything.' Pupils across the school benefit from reading high-quality texts in class. They are strongly encouraged to read a wide range of literature, enthused and inspired by their teachers' recommendations. In return, teachers are held in high esteem for their love of literature and, in particular, their ability to find just the right book for each pupil. One pupil remarked that 'My teacher holds a library in her head.'

- The school's curriculum is exceptionally well considered and holds terrific appeal for pupils. Pupils participate in rich experiences, such as the recent whole-school trip to a hands-on science museum. Themes, such as the Romans, are further enhanced by engaging home-learning opportunities. Pupils describe their topic homework as 'Simply the best!' As a result, the standard of work across a wide range of subjects is excellent, and pupils achieve well.
- Parents are extremely fond of the school, which they describe as a 'real community school'. The acting headteacher is attentive, meeting the needs of parents well and hosting regular drop-in sessions. Governors and senior leaders have gone to great lengths to ensure that parents are welcomed into the heart of the school. As a result, many parents note how much communication has improved in recent times, including through the introduction of an online messaging service. Regular opportunities, such as attending special events like the key stage 1 poetry recital or viewing the whole class's topic homework, contribute well to building this very strong partnership between home and school. One parent, encapsulating the views of many, reported: 'The school has consistently improved their communication and inclusion of parents. I am delighted my children attend this school.'

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the progress of the most able pupils accelerates in reading, writing and mathematics so that more achieve at greater depth
- the school improvement plan identifies measurable milestones so that responsible stakeholders are able to evaluate the difference their actions are making to raising standards
- the school's website meets statutory requirements.

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

Elizabeth Farr
Her Majesty's Inspector
Information about the inspection

I met with you, the acting deputy headteacher and four governors, including the chair of the governing body. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I also met with six pupils in key stage 2 and considered the 71 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. I observed learning in six lessons or parts of lessons, all jointly with the headteacher. I took account of 64 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 46 free-text comments. I also took account of the views of 10 members of the school's team who responded to the online survey for staff. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including information about pupils' achievement, the school improvement plan and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness.