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Mr Lee Smith
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Dear Mr Smith

Short inspection of Coton-in-the-Elms CofE Primary Schools

Following my visit to the school on 12 January 2017, 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 November 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. During your first year as headteacher, following your arrival in September 2015, the school experienced a great deal of staffing turbulence. Nevertheless, you have ensured that all classes have remained fully staffed and you have used the opportunity to create a new leadership team, which has helped you to raise expectations considerably. You fully recognise that the 2016 outcomes for pupils were not high enough. You and your senior leaders are working hard, and successfully, to drive up the quality of teaching across the school.

You are checking thoroughly how teachers are planning and delivering lessons, and are examining pupils' English and mathematics work to see how effective teaching is. As a result, you are able to give governors a clear understanding of what teachers are doing well, and what they need to improve. You are putting in place effective action to ensure that the quality of teaching is nothing less than good. This includes a range of effective training opportunities for staff, as well as arranging for them to visit other schools to see high-quality teaching taking place.

As a result of your work, and the support of the new subject leaders for English and mathematics, who are also coordinators for their respective key stages, teaching in almost all classes is now good or better, and is continuing to improve. You are supporting teachers who are less effective to plan, and deliver, better lessons. You are, however, unapologetic in expecting all staff to raise their game for the benefit of pupils.

As a result of your work, classrooms are productive learning environments where pupils listen respectfully to adults and to each other, follow instructions and work hard. Pupils cooperate together well and know it is important to do their best. Those pupils I met told me how staff give them good support to help them to catch up. Pupils are also completing much more work in their lessons. During my visit, I examined a large number of exercise books from different groups of pupils from age ranges across the school. These show that, overall, pupils' skills in English are improving at a good rate in most classes. Pupils are demonstrating greater skills in writing, using increasingly complex vocabulary and punctuation, as well as writing in a wide range of styles and for a variety of purposes. Pupils overall are also developing increasing fluency in their mathematics, and there is a good balance of work in number and in shape, space and measures. The overall rate of progress pupils are making is also accelerating.

You are passionate in your conviction that there must be no complacency and no reduction in the pace of current improvement. You are fully aware that the remaining gaps in pupils' knowledge that you and your leaders have identified need to be addressed. In addition, some of recent changes you have begun are not securely embedded yet. For example, though pupils' writing is improving, you know that teachers are not giving them enough opportunities to write longer pieces of work, especially in subjects other than in English. Pupils' skills in mathematics are now more secure, but you realise they do not yet receive enough opportunities to reason mathematically, and to justify why they believe an answer is right or wrong. In addition, though the needs of the most able pupils are being better addressed overall, you agree that work for these pupils, particularly in mathematics, is not challenging enough. Moreover, you recognise that, while the progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving overall, not all the differences are diminishing between their attainment and those of other pupils nationally. This is also true of the most able disadvantaged pupils.

The governing body, while giving you strong support, is monitoring the school's provision, and its impact on pupils' outcomes, closely. They are checking that the changes you are putting in place are proving to be sufficiently effective, and they are unafraid to challenge you in any instances where pupils' progress is not accelerating sufficiently. They are also checking that the rigorous system of appraisal in place ensures that teachers' targets are linked to improvements in their classroom performance.

Staff who responded to Ofsted's online survey unanimously confirm that the school is improving. They have a clear idea of the school's aims, and feel that you respect them and are considerate of their well-being and that you are giving them good opportunities to improve.

Safeguarding is effective.

Staff have been thoroughly trained in safeguarding and understand fully that it is their duty to report any concerns they have immediately. Those I met during my visit were able to describe clearly to me the different warning signs of abuse, and the school's procedure for informing you if they feel a child may be being harmed. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and records are detailed and of high quality. These show clearly that you

make brisk referrals to external agencies where needed. Your records of communication with parents show convincingly that your responses are both timely and appropriate.

A very large majority of parents who responded to Parent View believe that the school keeps pupils safe. Pupils I met during my visit also stated this. They told me how there is very little bullying or name-calling in the school. On the rare occasions that it does occur, they explained how staff deal with it quickly and effectively. Pupils also told me how staff teach them effectively how to keep safe from strangers, roads, rivers and when using technology.

Inspection findings

- You have addressed effectively overall the areas for improvement identified by inspectors at the last inspection. You ensure that the success of actions in your school development plan is now evaluated explicitly by the progress that pupils are making.
- Results from 2016 indicate that, in key stage 1, the most able pupils made significantly less progress compared to similar pupils nationally in writing and mathematics, and in key stage 2, pupils' progress in reading was also significantly below the national average. There are now encouraging signs of more challenge for the most able pupils in their writing in many year groups. This was another area that inspectors identified for improvement. However, your school's self-evaluation, and a scrutiny of work for the most able pupils that I undertook during my visit, indicates that this is not yet consistent in all cases. Particularly in mathematics, the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, are not currently being given sufficiently difficult work that makes them think hard.
- Published outcomes indicate that the proportion of pupils in Year 1 passing the phonics screening check has declined for the past three years, and, at 71% this year, is below the national average of 81%. You have ensured that teachers are improving their phonics teaching, with effective support for those pupils who did not meet the standard, and teaching which is matched more precisely to meeting the needs of pupils so that their phonics skills improve. Over time, the proportion of pupils who meet the standard by the end of Year 2 is broadly in line with that found nationally.
- Pupils in the 2016 Year 2 cohort performed significantly less well in writing and mathematics, compared to other pupils nationally. This was because teaching for these pupils over time was not consistently effective. These pupils are now catching up, and you have put in place a comprehensive package of action to ensure that the quality of teaching in all subjects improves in key stage 1.
- Last year, pupils of typical ability who were in the 2016 Year 6 cohort made significantly less progress in writing and mathematics than similar pupils nationally. This was because these pupils did not receive sufficiently effective teaching during their time in key stage 2. Pupils were not given sufficient guidance on how to demonstrate their skills in writing, and had historic gaps in their mathematical understanding. Pupils of middle ability currently in the school are now making good and improving progress overall due to the higher expectations you are insisting on, and better teaching. However, they, and all

groups of pupils, do not currently have sufficient opportunities to write at length, particularly across the curriculum. You have plans to address this.

- Pupils overall are also making good and improving progress in their mathematics with, for example, pupils in Year 6 able to add fractions of different denominators and answer complex sums with a sequence of steps. However, pupils' work shows that they do not receive sufficient guidance in how to reason mathematically and explain their work.
- There are encouraging signs of accelerated progress for many disadvantaged pupils. However, this is not the case for all. A new strategy has been written to ensure better provision and more effective use of the pupil premium to support these pupils. However, you agree that more needs to be done to ensure that progress for all disadvantaged pupils is substantial and sustained, so that the differences between their attainment and that of other pupils nationally diminish as quickly as possible.
- Until the last academic year, pupils' attendance was good. However, absence in 2015/16 rose and was above the national average, particularly for girls and for pupils on free school meals. There was no single reason for this, but you have nevertheless made pupils' attendance a priority. As a result, absence has fallen and attendance for pupils, including those on free school meals, is above the national average once again. The level of persistent absence has been cut by almost a half and is below the national average.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the remaining differences diminish between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and others nationally
- pupils swiftly receive sufficient, regular opportunities in all year groups to reason in mathematics and to write at extended length, including across the curriculum
- the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, are consistently and fully challenged, particularly in mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Roary Pownall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, representatives of the governing body and the subject leaders for English, mathematics and provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You and I visited classes in all key stages in the school to observe teaching and learning. I looked at a considerable sample of pupils' work from across the school from different groups of pupils. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and met with a group of them at breaktime. I considered one letter from parents of a pupil in the school, alongside the views of the 92 parents who responded to the school's recent survey, and the 39 posted on Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, together with comments parents made on Ofsted's free text facility. I read a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, your school development plan and information on outcomes for pupils currently in the school. I visited the breakfast club, which is maintained by the governing body, to check that pupils were safe. I studied information related to attendance, anonymised examples of teachers' appraisal and examined safeguarding records and policies. I examined the school's website to check that it meets requirements on the publication of specified information. I looked at the range of views expressed by staff, through Ofsted's questionnaire, about the school and its leadership.