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Jon Gray  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Gray

### **Short inspection of Cutteslowe Primary 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 school was judged to be good in March 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Since the last inspection, there has been much turbulence in the senior leadership of Cutteslowe Primary, with three heads of school in the past two years. Governors have taken decisive action to stabilise the leadership of the school. You were executive headteacher across two schools, including Cutteslowe. This changed in November 2018 when you took up the post of headteacher. Working alongside your deputy headteacher, and supported by the school business manager, who took up their posts at the same time, leadership is now focused on improving the school.

You and the deputy headteacher know the school well. You have recently introduced a new behaviour policy. This has had a positive impact on the behaviour of pupils in the school, with both the number of incidents and exclusions dropping sharply. Vulnerable pupils are supported well. The deputy headteacher monitors attendance carefully and works effectively with families to help improve pupils' attendance. As a result, there is an improving trend in the attendance of pupils, so that it is now similar to that seen nationally in primary schools. This includes the attendance of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals.

Staff are very complimentary about the current leadership structure. As one member of staff told me, 'There is now a real sense of purpose and clear direction.' There is a strong teamwork ethic in the school and staff are determined to drive

forward necessary improvements. You are well supported by your multi-academy trust staff, who challenge and guide you effectively.

Pupils enjoy many aspects of school life at Cutteslowe, including playing on the field, the school library and the educational trips. They were very much looking forward to dressing up as book characters for World Book Day, a few days after my visit. They say that their teachers are supportive, thoughtful and understanding, a view confirmed by many parents and carers. As one parent commented, 'The staff are passionate about teaching and about the school. Teachers and leaders always go the extra mile to ensure that the children have a rich and varied learning experience.'

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors highlighted the good start that children have to school life in the early years. Leaders have maintained this good provision well and it remains a strength. Children in the early years demonstrate high levels of curiosity about the world around them and are responsive to adult guidance and questions. They play and learn well together.

The previous inspection asked school leaders to ensure that teachers adjust tasks appropriately when pupils find them too easy or too hard. Leaders have been partially successful here. During my visits to lessons and while looking at pupils' books, I saw that, in some classes, the most able pupils are challenged well. In 2018, in Year 6, a greater proportion than that seen nationally attained the higher standard in reading. Misconceptions are addressed swiftly to support good learning in some classes. Errors are spotted quickly and learning deepened through effective guidance on improving work and strong questioning. However, leaders are aware that currently, teaching is not consistently good across the school.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

School leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Day-to-day routines are secure. Any necessary actions are completed quickly and are followed up efficiently. Leaders make sure that there is ongoing training for staff and governors so that they know how to keep pupils safe. The school works successfully with local agencies to ensure that the needs of pupils and their families are addressed well. The record of checks on adults' suitability to work and volunteer in the school is maintained diligently.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that they are listened to by adults. They appreciate the box where they can post their worries for the school counsellor to read. They know their concerns are acted on. They say that occasionally there is bullying in the school and that the teachers deal with it. Pupils thrive on the leadership roles that they are given, including the role of well-being ambassadors. The ambassadors regularly lead assemblies to enhance pupils' understanding of the different types of bullying and how to stop it. However, a small number of parents are not convinced that leaders deal with bullying incidents well enough. Leaders are aware of this and are currently in consultation with parents on a new anti-bullying policy.

## Inspection findings

- At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed that the focus would be on: the teaching of writing; how well pupils learn across the curriculum; and how effectively leaders and governors ensure that the school continues to improve.
- The teaching of writing is inconsistent in quality across the school. In 2018, by the end of key stage 2, pupils made well below average rates of progress when compared to the national picture. In addition, you told me that published information suggesting that writing at key stage 1 was well above the national average is incorrect. The proportion of pupils who met the expected standard at the end of key stage 1 in 2018 was actually in line with the national figure. Following our visits to classes to observe learning, and a scrutiny of pupils' work in books, we agreed that the quality of teaching varies too much across the school, not solely in writing. This slows the progress that pupils make across the school. Some parents are also concerned about the amount of progress that their children make. Assessment is not always accurate. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can attain in writing are not always high enough. Consequently, a high proportion of pupils in key stage 2 are writing at a standard below that expected for their age. Leaders have started to address the areas of weakness in teaching in the school, but it is too early to see the impact of these actions.
- Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is exciting and varied. Knowledge and skills are mapped out progressively to build on pupils' prior learning. An important aspect of the curriculum at Cutteslowe is ensuring that pupils are ready to learn, for example through relaxation techniques. Pupils told me how 'big belly breathing' helps them to be calm in class. Another aspect of learning, successfully woven through the curriculum at Cutteslowe, is equality and diversity. This is often linked to local social history and the Cutteslowe Walls. The week before my visit, parents and carers had been invited to attend a 'festival of culture', a culmination of learning about cultures from within their local community. As a result, pupils show each other great respect and get on well. However, as leaders know, inconsistencies in teaching reflect in the quality of work and the rates of progress that some pupils make in the wider curriculum.
- Following a period of instability in leadership, school improvement is heading in the right direction. Leaders have ensured that plans are focused on the right things, as a result of accurate self-evaluation. Leaders know that eliminating the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, so that all teaching is as strong as the best practice in the school, is a priority. Currently, disadvantaged pupils do not make enough progress in the school and their attainment is too low. More needs to be done for this group of pupils.
- There has been turbulence in the local governing body and this is currently led by an interim chair. Governors are realistic, however, about what needs to be done, and they support and challenge leaders well.
- Middle leaders are eager to make a difference, under your clear direction. In the recent past, the lack of stability in senior leadership has slowed down the impact of the work of middle leaders on school improvement. Not all middle leaders

have yet developed the skills required to do what they have identified is necessary to improve their areas of responsibility.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they eliminate inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning, particularly, but not solely, in writing, so that all groups of pupils make stronger progress
- disadvantaged pupils make rates of progress that match those of other pupils nationally with similar starting points so that a greater proportion meet and exceed expectations for their age
- middle leaders' skills are further developed so that they can contribute more fully to whole-school improvement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing body, the chief executive officer of The River Learning Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Oxfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lea Hannam  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you and your deputy headteacher to discuss the school's effectiveness. Together, we visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning, talk to pupils, and to look at their work. With the English leader, we looked at the quality of work in a range of pupils' books. I considered the 86 responses from parents to the online questionnaire, Parent View, including free-text comments. I also spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day. Responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil questionnaires were considered and I had a meeting with a group of pupils to discuss their views about the school.

I met with five governors, including the interim chair of the local governing body, and also met with the support and challenge partner from your multi-academy trust. In addition, I met with a team of middle leaders. I evaluated the school's safeguarding arrangements. A wide range of documents was examined, including the school's self-evaluation, school improvement planning, attendance information, information about pupils' progress, and various policies. I also examined the school's website.