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Mr Simon Green  
Headteacher  
Tidcombe Primary School  
Marina Way  
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Devon  
EX16 4BP

Dear Mr Green

### **Short inspection of Tidcombe Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 23 May 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in February 2013. The school joined St Christopher's Multi Academy Trust (the trust) in September 2016.

### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Tidcombe is a fully inclusive school that has many strengths. You have built strong partnerships between home and school and this allows for you and your staff to support your pupils well. You make careful provision for pupils who need extra help, which enables them to feel safe and to be successful. A strong sense of community permeates the school and is valued by parents and staff. Morale in the school is high. Parents spoken to during the inspection and those who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were very positive about the school. One parent said, 'Tidcombe is a lovely school with a fantastic learning environment. Thanks to the efforts of all staff, my son's progress has astounded us.' Another said, 'Tidcombe was recommended by a friend; she was so right.' Pupils and staff are characterised by kindness, care and mutual respect. Pupils' behaviour is excellent.

During the inspection, pupils told me how they enjoy their learning, and this is reflected in pupils' good attendance. They are clearly proud of their school and enjoy the range of experiences that staff provide. Pupils in Year 4 were eager to tell me how their visit to Tiverton Museum helped them with their learning about the Roman era. On the day of the inspection, pupils from the after-school running club competed in the local schools' cross-country event. On their return, they were very proud to share with me their success, with Year 3 and 4 boys winning their age group.

Governors are determined and committed to the school. They make regular visits and this has enabled them to know the school and pupils well. Since joining the trust, governors have been well supported in their strategic understanding of governance. The trust has provided regular checks to ensure that governors have an effective strategic oversight of the school. It has enabled governors to conduct a review and reorganisation to improve their capacity and ensure that they have the necessary skills to be effective. Governors welcome the support provided by the trust and recognise that they have more work to do in improving their effectiveness. However, their strategic plans do not enable them to hold leaders to account well enough.

Leaders recognise that development plans need to have a greater clarity and that there are some weaknesses in the school's plans for improvement. For example, they do not include clear measurable milestones or targets, and this hampers the process for governors to fully hold leaders to account.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Parents told me that you listen well to any concerns that they have and address them swiftly. Training for staff is up to date and in line with the latest statutory guidance. Staff and governors spoken with during the inspection had a secure understanding of the school's procedures and carry out their duties diligently.

Nearly all parents who responded to Parent View say that their children feel safe in school. Pupils told me that there is always a member of staff to speak to if they have any worries or concerns. Pupils were adamant that bullying does not happen at the school. They know how to stay safe online and what actions to take if they feel threatened. Pupils also spoke positively of their experiences of external agencies visiting the school, such as Childline, the police and the fire brigade. They say this has helped them in knowing how to stay safe outside of school. All pupils who responded to the pupil survey say they feel safe in school.

### **Inspection findings**

- At the start of the inspection, I met with you and your deputy headteacher to review your self-evaluation and school improvement plans. We agreed several key lines of enquiry to focus inspection activities. First, I wanted to look at teaching and learning across key stage 1, with a particular focus on boys. This is because at the end of 2018 boys did not achieve as well as other boys nationally.
- Teaching and learning across key stage 1 is effective. We visited a Year 2 class where the pupils were keen to show me how they have created their own version of 'How the camel got his hump.' Pupils were enthusiastic about their learning. Their work showed detailed and imaginative writing. Books we looked at together demonstrated how pupils are making strong progress over time, particularly in their sentence structure development.

- In response to the dip in attainment in 2018, you and your leader responsible for English arranged for key stage 1 staff to work closely with a local English hub, to raise standards in reading. Lessons we visited together and pupils who we observed reading demonstrated that the changes you have made to the approach to teaching reading are having a positive impact on pupils' reading skills. Current pupils in key stage 1 are making strong progress in reading.
- Your leader responsible for mathematics used her knowledge to broker support from the Jurassic Maths Hub to set up and lead teacher research groups. You and your leader identified weaknesses in pupils' understanding in mathematics and, as a result, adapted your approach to teaching mathematics. Work in pupils' books which we looked at and lessons we visited demonstrated that current pupils are making strong progress in their mathematics learning.
- I also focused on how well current girls are achieving in key stage 2. This is because in 2018 by the end of key stage 2 girls did not achieve as well as boys in writing and mathematics. You told me that this was an unusual profile, because of the high level of need in this specific cohort. Nevertheless, you introduced a more creative approach to writing, where pupils write for a distinct purpose. For example, pupils in Year 6 read the text 'Hannah's Suitcase', based on the Holocaust, and then used their knowledge and understanding to write a letter expressing their empathy. Work in books and current assessment information show that this approach is having a positive effect on pupils' writing outcomes.
- Mathematics is an emerging strength of the school. Work in pupils' books demonstrates how pupils are being taught a range of concepts systematically. This enables them to build upon their knowledge, skills and understanding well. Regular problem-solving activities form part of the mathematics work to help pupils apply their understanding to real-life contexts. There are no differences in current pupils' outcomes between boys and girls. As a result, all pupils are making strong progress from their different starting points.
- My third line of enquiry focused on how effective the provision of reading is for disadvantaged pupils in key stage 2. You rightly acknowledge that the number of disadvantaged pupils fluctuates in each year group and this has an impact on published data.
- At the start of 2018, you adapted the approach to reading to secure a more consistent approach across the school. You provided additional support for parents to enable them to support their children at home and invested in improving the quality of texts available for pupils. Pupils who spoke with me told me that they enjoy the new approach to reading and read widely and often. In the lessons we visited we found that pupils are developing a range of reading skills that enable them to read fluently. Teachers use precise questioning to deepen pupils' understanding and challenge their interpretations. Pupils we listened to read well. I found no differences in reading ability between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school.
- My final line of enquiry focused on spelling, punctuation and grammar. This is because in 2018 outcomes fell below the national average. You told me that because of this there has been a determined drive across the school to improve pupils' spellings. The work in pupils' books that we looked at showed that pupils

respond well to teachers' feedback and are now spelling words correctly that they previously misspelled. You also told me that you have focused on improving pupils' editing skills to have an impact upon punctuation and grammar. Pupils now work confidently to improve their writing, using self-editing as a matter of routine. The impact clearly shows in the accuracy of pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar. The standards of spelling, punctuation and grammar are strong.

- During the inspection, most pupils spoke positively about their learning and the wider curriculum beyond English and mathematics. However, a small proportion of pupils in Year 6 told me that they feel they have not always had their full complement of learning in music, religious education and art. Discussions I held with the teacher responsible for Year 6 and the sample of books that I looked at confirmed their view. Although pupils do experience a wide curriculum, in some subjects the depth is not adequate.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- governors continue to adopt a more strategic approach to monitoring and evaluation so that they have a more secure view of school improvement
- pupils systematically build up their knowledge and skills across the wider curriculum
- they refine their development plans to include clear targets to enable them to evaluate the impact of these plans.

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

Yours sincerely

Matt Middlemore  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, senior and middle leaders, and two members of the local governing body, including the chief executive officer. I considered the 46 responses to Parent View, including the free-text comments, and met with a group of parents at the start of the school day. I spoke with pupils formally and informally during the day. I also considered the 23 responses to the staff survey and 35 responses to the pupil survey. We observed teaching and learning together and I listened to a sample of pupils read. Together, we looked at a range of pupils' work in exercise books. I scrutinised a range of school

documentation, including the single central record, current performance information, your school self-evaluation and the most recent improvement plan.