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Mr Richard Lane
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mr Lane

Short inspection of Flax Hill Junior Academy

Following my visit to the school on 10 November 2016, 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 March 2012. The school converted to an academy in January 2014 and is part of the Mercia Primary Academy Trust.

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 further strengthened leadership within the school, through the appointment of the deputy headteacher and the leader of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They, together with the head of school, provide strong and effective leadership that has helped to improve teaching and outcomes for pupils. They share your vision that pupils at Flax Hill Junior Academy should thrive and succeed, both academically and socially. This has helped to ensure that outcomes for pupils have risen over the past three years and that pupils develop as responsible and well-behaved individuals.

You have successfully addressed the recommendations from the last inspection of the predecessor school by improving the systems in school to monitor and evaluate pupils' outcomes and the quality of teaching. Monitoring systems are now robust and rigorous, and provide you, and other leaders, with a good range of information that you use to identify the priorities for improvement for the school. You have also ensured that those pupils who had not been making the progress that was expected of them, and who were falling behind the attainment of their classmates, are now provided with appropriate support that allows them to catch up in their learning.

Flax Hill Junior Academy is a warm and welcoming school that provides a safe and nurturing environment for its pupils. You, and the rest of the staff, have ensured that relationships between adults and pupils are strong and that pupils develop positive social skills. The emphasis that you place on ensuring that pupils feel valued is seen in many aspects of the school's work. An example of this is the weekly headteacher's 'tea party', where small groups of pupils are chosen to meet with the head of school to discuss any concerns and to suggest ways that the school can improve further. This opportunity is appreciated by the pupils, who show high levels of pride in their school.

Support for pupils' welfare and well-being is a strength of the school and has been further developed over the past two years. The appointment, in 2015, of a skilled and knowledgeable family support worker has been highly effective in meeting the emotional needs of pupils. She, together with all staff, provides good support for disadvantaged pupils, and as a result they achieve outcomes that compare well with those of other pupils nationally. However, teachers do not consistently ensure that the level of challenge for the most able pupils in school, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, is sufficiently demanding. You are aware that there is a need to identify how this aspect of the school's work can be improved further.

You have ensured that teaching has continued to improve since the last inspection. You have identified where teaching has been less effective and have provided well-planned support for teachers that is matched to their individual needs. The majority of teachers who were at the school at the time of the last inspection are no longer at the school and you have taken the opportunity to appoint new teachers who share your drive to provide pupils with exciting and relevant learning opportunities. All teachers and other staff who responded to the online questionnaire felt motivated and respected. Pupils spoken to during the inspection said that teachers made learning fun.

You, together with other leaders, have developed a well-planned and relevant curriculum that provides pupils with effective opportunities to make good progress across all subjects. There is an extremely strong focus on supporting pupils' cultural development, especially through music, which is a strength of the school. Calculation skills are taught well in mathematics and this results in pupils being secure in activities such as addition and multiplication. However, you, and other leaders, have rightly identified that pupils are not yet provided with enough opportunities to apply their mathematical knowledge in problem solving using reasoning. While this is identified as a priority in the current school improvement plan, actions taken have not yet had time to embed this aspect of mathematics teaching.

Safeguarding is effective.

The procedures and processes that you have put in place in school to make sure pupils are safe and well cared for are robust, well thought out and applied

diligently by all staff. The safeguarding of pupils is regarded as of the highest priority. The commonly held and well-founded belief among all staff that for pupils to make good progress academically they must feel safe, means that there is a culture in school of safeguarding and child protection being everyone's responsibility. Staff training is regular and is updated to ensure that all staff are aware of any changes in practice or policy relating to safeguarding. The family support worker's detailed knowledge of safeguarding requirements is used very effectively to work with potentially vulnerable pupils and their families. Record-keeping is meticulous and links with outside agencies are used well to provide support where it is needed. Teachers ensure that pupils are taught about the risks that use of the internet can pose and consequently pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe when online. Office staff and the family support worker ensure that monitoring of pupils' attendance is carried out effectively. As a result, attendance in school is above the national average.

Inspection findings

- Systems in school for monitoring teaching and learning and their impact on pupils' outcomes are effective and thorough. Leaders undertake a range of monitoring, including observation of teaching, scrutiny of planning and pupils' books and discussions with pupils about their work.
- There is an effective structure of distributed leadership in school. The head of school provides strong and effective leadership to the school on a day-to-day basis. She has a deep and secure knowledge of the pupils as individuals and is respected by the parents. The appointment of the deputy headteacher in 2015 has further strengthened leadership and he has led the development work that has improved reading and writing in school. You, as executive headteacher, provide good strategic leadership and have ensured that all staff share your vision to ensure each pupil develops and thrives, both academically and socially.
- Leaders ensure that teachers who are new to the profession are well supported in school, with good opportunities established for them to observe, work alongside and learn from experienced colleagues, both in school and in other schools.
- Governors have a secure understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and provide good levels of support. Link governors liaise closely with school leaders with areas of specific responsibility and ask searching and perceptive questions to make sure they understand how the school is performing, compared with other schools locally and nationally.
- There is a very strong emphasis in school on ensuring that pupils make good progress across all subject areas. A well thought out, balanced and broad curriculum has been developed. Pupils have good opportunities to apply their writing skills in meaningful and relevant activities, both within literacy lessons and in other subject areas.
- Improvements in the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics since the last inspection have helped to ensure that there has been a year-on-year improvement in pupils' outcomes in these areas. Pupils' progress in these

subjects compares well with that of other pupils nationally.

- Pupils are well supported in their reading development. Regular group and class reading sessions are used well to ensure that pupils become confident readers who gain enjoyment from books. Pupils spoken to during the inspection expressed positive views about reading and liked the books that were available to them in school. Those pupils who are not secure in their use of phonics in reading receive small-group support to ensure that they develop a secure understanding of how to read and spell words correctly.
- Writing activities are stimulating and relevant to the pupils. For example, during the inspection pupils in a Year 6 class were engaged by the opportunity to write a recount about a robbery of donations of harvest products and, as a result, produced well thought out pieces of writing that were accurately spelled and were of interest to the reader.
- Calculation skills are taught well in mathematics, with a whole-school approach to core skills such as addition, subtraction and multiplication. However, opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills in problem solving, using reasoning, are underdeveloped.
- There is a strong emphasis in school on supporting pupils' development in other subjects. All pupils in Years 3 and 4 learn both the recorder and the violin. Pupils enjoy and appreciate the opportunities they have to perform in the school orchestra and choir, both of which perform in school and in the community.
- Teachers ensure that pupils develop a good understanding of democracy, respect and tolerance. Pupils take their roles on the school council seriously. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Allocation of the pupil premium grant is carefully planned and monitored. The school has been recognised with a national award for its success in making very effective use of the funding. Additional teaching assistant support within classrooms, funding to enable disadvantaged pupils to participate fully in all aspects of school life, and one-to-one support where needed, have all helped to ensure that disadvantaged pupils in school achieve good outcomes.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils is carefully monitored and compared with that of other pupils nationally. Leaders recognise that it is often not simply sufficient for disadvantaged pupils to make the same progress as other pupils if the difference in their attainment is to be overcome. Consequently, all staff go the extra mile to ensure that all pupils in school achieve and attain well.
- Over recent years the outcomes for pupils by the time they leave the school in Year 6 have compared favourably with those of other pupils nationally. In 2015, disadvantaged pupils made slightly better progress from their starting points than other pupils nationally in mathematics and writing and similar progress in reading. In 2016, disadvantaged pupils' progress was slightly above that nationally in reading and mathematics, but below in writing.
- The most able disadvantaged pupils in school do not consistently achieve the outcomes that they are capable of, based on their starting points in school. In 2016, their outcomes were below those of other pupils with similar starting points nationally in both reading and writing.

- School leaders recognise that expectations for the most able pupils in school are not high enough. Teachers do not yet set work that is consistently challenging and requires these pupils to think deeply and achieve outcomes that are appropriate to their abilities.
- In 2015, outcomes for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities were well below those expected for their age. This was because previously expectations for these pupils had not been high enough and teachers and leaders had not ensured that support put in place was effective or appropriate.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities has improved significantly during the past year. The leader for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, who was appointed in March 2016, has quickly identified what aspects of provision needed to improve. All teachers and teaching assistants have received training on how they must meet the needs of these pupils. Teachers now have a far clearer focus on improving outcomes for these pupils in their classes. Interventions are then planned and taught over a short space of time, with closely defined success criteria to measure the impact of the action.
- As a result of the action that has been taken, these pupils are now making far better progress and gaps in their learning are closing rapidly.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide pupils with more opportunities to apply problem solving and reasoning in mathematics
- expectations from teachers for the most able pupils are sufficiently high, so that more pupils can achieve the highest levels of development.

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

Yours sincerely

Adam Hewett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the head of school, the deputy headteacher, and the leader in charge of special educational needs provision. I also met with three governors, including the chair of the governing body, and with a director of the multi-academy trust. I spoke to a group of parents at the beginning of the school day. I also considered the 13 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View and looked at free text comments from nine

parents. I visited, together with you and the head of school, nine classes to observe teaching and learning. I met with a group of pupils, including members of the school council, and listened to some pupils read. I also spoke with pupils in lessons and on the playground.

I scrutinised information about children's progress during the last academic year. I considered other documentation, including the school's self-evaluation of its own performance and the school improvement plan. I scrutinised the school's safeguarding procedures, including policies and checks on staff employed in the school, and checked the school website. I also analysed the range of views expressed by staff through Ofsted's questionnaire about the school and its leadership.

During this inspection I focused on a number of key lines of enquiry. These included:

- how successfully the school ensures that disadvantaged pupils, including the most able pupils, make good progress and achieve outcomes that are at least in line with those of other pupils nationally
- the actions that school leaders are taking to ensure that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported and taught effectively
- how effectively leaders and managers within the school monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment
- how successfully the school has developed a curriculum that prepares pupils for life in modern Britain.