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Mrs V Cranton
Principal
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Dear Mrs Cranton

Short inspection of Hollymount School

Following my visit to the school on 6 June 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 predecessor school was judged to be good in September 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Following the school's conversion to an academy in 2014, you and the governing body took the opportunity to reorganise leadership roles and responsibilities. You appointed a head of school and recruited two new senior leaders with expertise in early years and in special educational needs. This has strengthened leadership and helped to sustain the drive for improvement.

Your approach to improving the quality of teaching is effective. You believe that the school should be a professional learning community. The staff bring this vision to life. They take full advantage of the many professional development opportunities available to them. These include involvement in national research projects, individual teaching support programmes and routine opportunities to learn from outstanding teaching within and beyond the school. A culture of professional learning and continual improvement is very evident across the school.

At the last inspection of the predecessor school, inspectors identified a need for all leaders to develop fully the skills of monitoring, evaluating and improving the work of the school. They also recommended that leaders introduce systems for checking pupils' achievement in all subjects. You have fully addressed both of these areas. Middle leaders are now more accountable for improving the quality of teaching and learning, including coaching and mentoring staff. They lead weekly meetings that

focus on pupils' learning and progress. This ensures consistency of high-quality teaching across the school.

Subject leaders have introduced effective systems for checking pupils' achievement across all subjects. There is a rolling programme in place for teachers to share and discuss their judgements about pupils' learning. This has helped teachers to improve their subject knowledge across the national curriculum. It has also helped them to have a clear view of the progress that their pupils make and be clear about what pupils need to do next in order to improve their knowledge and skills further.

Leaders have prioritised improving the teaching of writing and have organised effective training for all staff. You have rightly identified the need to support pupils' communication and language skills as part of this work and actions taken have had a positive impact. Staff use questioning effectively to encourage pupils to express their views and use new vocabulary confidently.

Teachers plan many opportunities for pupils to write extended pieces of work across a wide range of interesting topics such as the history of Worcester and the Civil War. At the end of Year 6 in 2016, standards of writing were in line with the national average. You continue to work to ensure that the most able pupils are given suitably challenging tasks and have opportunities to write at greater depth and achieve higher standards in writing by the time that they leave the school.

During this short inspection, I focused on a small number of key aspects of the school's work. I considered how well the school ensures that children reach a good level of development by the end of early years. I also looked at how well teaching challenges the most able in reading and writing.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Your commitment to safeguarding is characterised by the staff's vigilance in identifying any concerns. This is coupled with the care and attention to detail that you show in your swift responses and robust follow-through. As one member of staff commented: 'Everyone in our school has a role to play in keeping the children safe. We put this at the top of our list.' You organise frequent external safeguarding audits, reviews and risk assessments. Any recommendations are actioned quickly. The governors' safeguarding scrutiny committee plays an active role in this. Together, you ensure that pupils benefit from a close-knit network of support between school, external agencies and community services.

A programme of personal, social and health education lessons provide many opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of how to keep themselves safe in a range of real-life situations. This includes safety when using the internet. The e-safety notice board is a useful source of information for pupils and parents. Pupils were eager to refer to it when discussing their understanding of e-safety with me during the inspection.

The core values, at the heart of the school, contribute to a caring ethos of trust and respect. Pupils demonstrate a strong sense of self-worth and confidence. They say that they can always find someone to talk to if they are worried. All of the parents that I spoke to during the inspection and those who responded to Ofsted's online survey were confident that their children are safe and secure in your care.

Inspection findings

- There is an effective leadership structure in school. The head of school provides strong leadership on a day-to-day basis. Senior leaders skilfully lead improvements in teaching and learning. As principal, you provide strong, strategic leadership and ensure that the school benefits from your work with other schools.
- Leaders, including governors, have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. The school improvement plan is detailed and focuses on areas where the school can improve further.
- You recognise that there is more work to be done to ensure that the most able pupils are challenged appropriately and have opportunities to achieve the higher standards of greater depth in writing by the end of Year 6. The subject leader for English is aware of this. Action plans include clear milestones and appropriate targets for improvement.
- Leaders have taken decisive actions to improve the teaching of phonics. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check increased to above the national figure in 2016. Pupils use their phonic skills well to support their spelling in writing. Staff have regular training which helps to sustain the high quality of teaching.
- Although pupils' phonics skills are improving, you recognise that many pupils do not have extensive experience of listening to, sharing and discussing books. This prevents them from developing a love of reading and reaching the standards of greater depth in their reading. You are addressing this effectively. Skilful teaching, with popular children's books, is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' comprehension, confidence and enjoyment of reading. For example, during the inspection, pupils talked with a depth of understanding and enthusiasm about class readers, such as 'The Tin Forest' and 'Voices in the Park'.
- Children typically enter the early years with low levels of development for their age, particularly in communication and language skills and in physical development. You have expanded the early years to include two-year-old provision. You have ensured that staff are well supported, highly skilled and quick to identify and address children's needs.
- Adults skilfully encourage children's curiosity and independent exploration. There is a positive, caring atmosphere of purposeful learning across early years. Adults encourage children to speak and to listen to others and share ideas. For example, during the inspection, children were choosing and balancing building blocks to build a wall. They were making decisions together and trying out their ideas. As a result of these opportunities, children make good progress and enjoy their

learning.

- This relentless focus on improving the quality and standards of provision in the early years is beginning to have an impact. Children's levels of development on entry to Reception are improving. The proportion of children that achieve a good level of development by the end of the early years has steadily improved, but you recognise that it remains too low. Leaders and staff are determined to continue to improve this. Action plans have well-defined milestones and challenging targets for improvement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils are challenged appropriately in writing and have opportunities to achieve the higher standards of greater depth by the end of Year 6
- improvements in the quality and standards of provision in the early years is sustained, so that more children reach a good level of development and are well prepared for Year 1.

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

Yours sincerely

Marilyn Mottram
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the head of school and other senior leaders. I held discussions with subject leaders. I also met with the chair of the governing body and three other governors. The head of school and the deputy headteacher joined me on brief visits to classes. We looked at examples of pupils' work and we talked to pupils about their learning. I spoke informally with pupils at different points during the school day and I listened to pupils read. I reviewed a range of documentation including the school's own self-evaluation of its performance, the school development plan, and documents related to keeping pupils safe. We discussed the most recent information about pupils' achievement. I took account of 11 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the school's own series of parent consultations, available on the school website. I considered 28 responses from members of staff to the online inspection questionnaire. I spoke to parents at the end of the school day. I also looked at information on the school's website.