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Mrs Janet Goddard and Mrs Gillian Stray
Co-Headteachers
Alban City School
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St Albans
Hertfordshire
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Dear Mrs Goddard and Mrs Stray

Short inspection of Alban City School

Following my visit to the school on 8 February 2018, 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 February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

You have been pivotal in continuously improving Alban City as the school has increased in size. Consequently, children and pupils are keen to do well and the atmosphere in classrooms is busy and purposeful. Pupils are very positive about their school experiences and the staff who care for them. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the 'soft start' in the mornings, where activities help pupils 'get ready' for learning and give them a 'head start' to their school day.

Parents are equally effusive and complimentary about your leadership and your success in 'retaining a strong set of values through the changes and transition' and 'giving children the best possible introduction to learning'. As one parent commented: 'Through the course of its growth, the school has maintained strong sense that the widest team of staff, parents and pupils must play a full role in shaping and building the very best school for the community. And it does.'

Both of you, and your team and governors, share a clear vision for the school which is fully supported by pupils and staff. You both have high expectations of what you and your staff can achieve. Overwhelmingly, staff responses to the Ofsted questionnaire show that they are proud to be part of Alban City School and they feel that the school is well led and managed. Additionally, pupils believe that they have a 'say in the changes as the school grows'.

You both receive support from a dedicated, experienced and skilful governing body. Governors use their skills, along with additional training, to support them in effectively fulfilling their roles and responsibilities. Governors challenge you both appropriately and make a positive contribution towards moving the school forward. They are well aware of all aspects of school life and know what needs to be done to make the school even better.

Over time, you have responded to the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. You were tasked with continuing to raise standards in the quality of teaching and learning. Through thorough recruitment processes and precise monitoring, you have continued to maintain the quality of teaching and learning, which has resulted in pupils' key stage 1 outcomes being above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics in both 2016 and 2017.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's safeguarding processes are of a good quality. Maintaining pupils' safety and well-being weaves through everything the school does. You have watertight procedures in place to ensure that pupils are kept safe. You are knowledgeable about families and ensure that they are provided with appropriate support when necessary.

Thorough checks are carried out on all staff working within school and visitors are carefully monitored. You and your team closely monitor all vulnerable pupils in school, and support and guidance are provided quickly and effectively. Governors routinely check on the quality of your safeguarding procedures.

Pupils say that they feel safe. They are confident in staff's ability to help them should they need it. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe online, both within school and at home. Through the curriculum and additional activities, pupils are given a good range of opportunities to explore their understanding of being safe and how they can keep each other safe.

Parents feel that their children are well cared for and safe at school. One parent's comments typify the views of many, saying: 'This is a safe, secure school and because of this children come home every day with a smile on their face, they are happy.'

Inspection findings

- The first area I focused upon during this inspection, in order to ascertain whether the school remains good, was to check how effectively leadership capacity is being developed at all levels as the school continues to increase in size. This is because of the school's rapid growth, including the addition of key stage 2. This also included how leaders are continuing to secure consistently effective high-quality teaching and learning with the necessary increases in staffing.
- The leadership structure has changed considerably. A co-headship has been in place since January 2018. This newly created role is adding strength and capacity

to the leadership team. Additionally, in September 2017, two phase leaders were appointed. These leaders, as well as already established leaders, are fittingly focused on the areas identified as requiring further development.

- You are using your expertise to support newer leaders to routinely carry out checks of the quality of teaching within their phase. You both effectively model for leaders how to monitor precisely and act upon the findings. However, you both agree that new leaders are still getting to know the school and developing in their roles. It is already a major part of your school improvement work to ensure that leaders are inducted well so they contribute more effectively to further raising standards.
- Leaders' engagement and motivation in their own professional development are extensive. For example, the school's chosen participation in the 'champions for excellence' project has successfully enhanced leaders' ability to develop their strategic understanding of the school's performance. Consequently, leaders, though new to leadership, are increasingly able to improve their effectiveness.
- The next aspect I explored was looking at how well the current Year 5 pupils are achieving. This came about because this group of pupils will be your first Year 6 cohort and, furthermore, will provide your first published key stage 2 statutory outcomes.
- Mobility across the whole school is high. It is highest in the current Year 5, and only 80 per cent of the year group are the same pupils who originally entered Year 3. You have set challenging targets for these pupils and are ensuring that high-quality support is provided to ensure that all pupils' needs are assessed quickly and individualised help secures rapid progress.
- The school's current assessment information indicates that pupils in Year 5 are working well towards meeting these aspirational targets. You are acutely aware that Year 5, along with other pupils in the school, including the most able, need more opportunities to write at length and apply their writing skills across the wider curriculum subjects in order to meet the higher standards.
- The final line of enquiry was looking at how well disadvantaged pupils achieve. The reason for this focus was that this small number of pupils have not achieved as well as their peers, or other pupils nationally, in key stage 1.
- Over time, as the school has grown, you have streamlined and focused the additional funding more effectively to support the needs of disadvantaged pupils. High-quality personalised programmes of support are in place. These are reviewed on a regular basis and their impact carefully evaluated. Disadvantaged pupils are now making better progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The difference between the small number of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally is diminishing.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all leaders, including phase leaders, further develop the depth of their monitoring and evaluation so they have a more precise awareness of the difference that

their work is making to pupils' outcomes

- more opportunities are provided for pupils to apply their writing skills across a range of subjects, so that there is greater challenge in writing, especially for the most able.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracy Fielding
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- During this inspection, I held meetings with you both, your deputy headteacher and all three phase leaders. I met with the chair of governors and other representatives of the governing body. I also held a telephone conversation with your independent external adviser.
- I spoke informally to pupils when I visited classrooms with you both and met with a group of pupils formally to talk to them about safety, behaviour and how they felt about their school experiences. While visiting the classrooms, I also looked at a range of pupils' books, including topic books and the learning journals in the Reception classes.
- I reviewed a wide range of documents about safeguarding, including the local authority's safeguarding audit, and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. I also looked at a sample of pupils' current work.
- The views of 218 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account, as well as the 209 responses that parents made using the free-text service. I also considered the views of parents I spoke to during the inspection.
- I looked at the 33 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey. There were no pupil responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey. However, I scrutinised recent 'pupil voice' evidence collected by the school's staff and leaders.