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Mrs Julie Fox
Herons' Moor Academy
Highlands Lane
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Weston-Super-Mare
BS24 7DX

Dear Mrs Fox

Short inspection of Herons' Moor Academy

Following my visit to the academy on 3 March 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 November 2011.

This school continues to be good.

Leaders and governors have maintained the good quality of education since the previous inspection. Despite being a very large primary academy, you and your team have maintained a real family feel to it. All members of the school community are very clear that 'happy children are successful children' and this is a very strong feature of the ethos of your school. Everyone is valued and knows that they belong to a positive and supportive environment where there is mutual respect among all, regardless of their vulnerability, special educational needs, disability or ethnicity. As one parent explained, staff get to know each child 'as a person and not a number or a statistic'.

At the time of the previous inspection, you were asked to improve the ways that you checked the progress that different pupils were making in relation to their gender, ethnicity and ability. During my visit, I was able to confirm that you have developed comprehensive systems that carefully track every pupil in your school. This enables you and your staff to check and evaluate individual progress by class, year group, gender, special educational needs and disability, vulnerability and ethnicity. You and your teachers quickly identify those groups of pupils who are not doing as well as their peers and respond to this by providing additional help to them. The success of the way in which you have used this tracking system to improve pupils' outcomes is exemplified by the narrowing of the achievement gap between those pupils who are disadvantaged and those who are not. Current information demonstrates the improved performance of boys who have not always achieved as well as girls.

Following the previous inspection, you were also asked to make sure that your teachers provided more challenge to the pupils in lessons, particularly the most able, and improved the way that teachers marked their work. The marking policy has been refined a number of times since the previous inspection. However, the current approach is now firmly embedded and clearly understood by all. Subject leaders and those responsible for the different key stages ensure that pupils have a clear understanding of what they can and cannot do. The school has also introduced improvements to the quality of lesson planning. This involves including three different levels of challenge, 'basic, advanced and deep' for each session.

Safeguarding is effective.

Central to the work of this school community is the safeguarding of all its pupils and staff. All adults who regularly come into contact with pupils are carefully checked and trained. Records are detailed and meticulously maintained. Policies and procedures ensure that everyone involved with the school is kept safe and secure. Teaching staff are vigilant and report any concerns that they may have about individual pupils to the senior team. These concerns are logged and carefully monitored, as appropriate, by you, the learning mentor and the family liaison officer. You work very closely with specialist agencies, both locally and further afield, when required. It is clear from individual case studies that you are extremely vigilant in all aspects of safeguarding. This is very much appreciated by the families and external agencies with which you work closely.

Pupils report that they feel very safe in the school and are clear about whom they would turn to if they had a problem or concern. They are fully aware of the dangers when using the internet or social media sites and know what to do if they are faced with an inappropriate message or website. Pupils are also knowledgeable about the safe use of mobile phones.

You, your staff and your governors have completed Prevent training, which is a government initiative to promote awareness of any form of extremism. There are appropriate policies and procedures in place to deal with any such matters should they arise.

Inspection findings

- You and your deputy headteacher are a strong team. You very effectively deploy your individual strengths to ensure the smooth running of all aspects of school life. The very positive relationships between leaders and staff support the work of the school well.
- Leaders and governors are extremely dedicated to the school and very ambitious for its future. The professional development that is provided for your teachers enables them to develop their careers well. Leaders and governors sensibly use the investment they have made in these individuals by appointing them to posts of responsibility. This has resulted in the creation of a strong and enthusiastic middle leadership team that supports you well and provides a consistency of approach.
- You and your key stage leaders know that the performance of pupils in Key Stage 2 is not as strong as it is in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. This is because pupils do not make as much progress in lower Key Stage 2 as they do in the rest of the school. The result of this is that teachers in Years 5 and 6 are required to focus on the pupils 'catching up' rather than 'keeping up'.
- Letters and sounds are taught well using a range of approaches and interesting resources. Throughout the school there is a strong focus on making sure that pupils understand what they are reading rather than merely decoding the words as an exercise.
- Pupils behave extremely well both in lessons and as they move around the building. They show high levels of concentration and are fully focused on their learning. Given that my visit coincided with World Book Day, it was impressive to see that, although all the pupils were dressed up as characters from books, they still behaved perfectly. They were not even distracted in their learning by such objects as ladybird wings, animal headdresses or large hats!
- Pupils talk enthusiastically about the topics they learn. They loved learning about Ancient Greeks and Egyptians and particularly enjoyed 'The Fun of the Fair', which helped them with the development of their scientific knowledge and skills. Lessons are brought alive with interesting trips to places such as London and Oxford. Good use is made of specialist facilities at local colleges. For example, pupils learn to use specialist scientific equipment at the nearby enterprise college and make good use of their six times tables when they learn how to lay bricks professionally at the local further education college. Pupils think Herons' Moor is a 'wonderful school' and consider that they are getting 'a good education'.

- You and your staff are justifiably proud of the pastoral care and support you offer. These are striking features of the school and much appreciated by parents, who acknowledge the high-quality social and emotional care provided. Any type of pupil achievement is recognised and celebrated. The monthly focus on different values, such as 'respect, trust and hope', helps pupils understand the fundamentals of good citizenship. The way in which the pupils work seamlessly with their peers at the special school who share the same building shows a high level of tolerance and consideration for others. They also develop a secure understanding of living in a democratic society when they select and vote for members of their school council.
- The recent appointment of a learning mentor, who works closely with the family liaison officer, has had an impressive impact on the improvement of pupils' attendance. This is particularly so with those who are vulnerable, have special educational needs or disability, or who are persistently absent. The learning mentor carefully monitors attendance rates and swiftly acts on any irregular absences. Close links are built up with parents who may be experiencing difficulties or who find it difficult to get their children to school. By building up trust with these families and supporting their children within the school, attendance rates have improved. Regular attendance awards are very much part of school life and pupils proudly receive rewards when appropriate.
- The vast majority of parents speak highly of the education and life experiences that their children receive at Herons' Moor. As one parent reported, 'the teachers and staff are, for want of a better word, "amazing"'.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the level of challenge is raised in the lower Key Stage 2 classes to enable all pupils to build on the good progress they make in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1
- teachers share their best practice in teaching with their colleagues in Years 3 and 4.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Chief Executive Officer of The Inspirational Futures Trust, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for North Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Hérons' Moor is part of The Campus, which includes a special school, children's centre and other community facilities. It converted to an academy in September 2012. In April 2015, it joined The Inspirational Futures Trust, which is a new trust sponsored by Weston College.

I met with you and your deputy headteacher and we discussed improvements since the previous inspection. In particular, we discussed improvements to the quality of teaching and the progress that different groups of pupils make. We also discussed your self-evaluation and the initiatives you were taking to further school improvement. I held discussions with your middle leaders and three governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. We visited all classes and looked at books together. I met with a group of pupils and reviewed the comments made by staff on the online questionnaire. I looked at the survey results from Parent View, and considered the comments that I received from parents.