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Mr Ian Taylor
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Dear Mr Taylor

Short inspection of The Kingfisher School

Following my visit to the school on 29 November 2016 with Linda McGill HMI, 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 2013. The school received a monitoring inspection in October 2015, where safeguarding arrangements were found to meet requirements.

In January 2014, The Kingfisher School became a member of the Advance Trust. The Advance Trust is a multi-academy trust comprising four special schools. There have been several changes to leadership and staff over the last two years.

This school continues to be good.

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

You, other leaders and staff at all levels display considerable enthusiasm and are committed to enabling pupils to 'be the best that they can be'. Since the school opened as an academy, you and the governing body have worked well to further strengthen leadership and have successfully established a team with a wide range of skills and expertise.

Leaders and governors have made sure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has continued to improve. Leaders have responded to changes at a national level and have developed a curriculum to meet the needs of pupils across the primary and secondary phases. The delivery of the new curriculum has been enhanced further by the establishment of several new learning areas within the school, including dedicated science and cooking classrooms.

You and your staff have responded effectively to the areas identified as requiring attention at the last monitoring inspection. A post-serious incident action plan has been implemented and leaders have adapted the curriculum to ensure that pupils develop their understanding of fundamental British values. Work in pupils' books demonstrates that they have a secure understanding of British values. During discussions with pupils in key stage 3, it was clear that they now have a better understanding of mutual respect and democracy. One pupil commented, 'We live in a democracy, you help take your country forwards'. Pupils also show a strong understanding of a range of different faiths and religions. The school's website has been updated and provides parents with valuable information about important areas such as safeguarding and the school's values. Governors are aware that some policies are now due for review.

Leaders have developed an assessment system based on the key skills that pupils need to acquire in a range of subjects and that takes account of the requirements of the national curriculum. Staff carefully track the progress that pupils make. Assessment information from the academic year 2015/16 shows that almost all pupils make strong rates of progress across the curriculum from their starting points.

A higher proportion of pupils now go on to secure GCSE qualifications in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. Notably in 2016, several pupils attained highly in information and communication technology (ICT). In 2016, every Year 11 pupil went on to a college course. The school makes sure that pupils access courses at a level that appropriately builds on their existing skills.

The school's own assessment information and work in books show that almost all pupils make strong progress, considering their different starting points. However, a small group of pupils in key stage 3 made less progress in some aspects of the curriculum in the last academic year. Leaders' current plans do detail how the school intends to accelerate rates of progress, but do not precisely respond to some of the differences between groups.

Safeguarding is effective.

A strong safeguarding culture has been established at the school. Staff are well trained and are encouraged to be vigilant. They know the pupils and their families well and refer any concerns, however minor, to the school's safeguarding lead. The concerns are appropriately and quickly followed up. Partnership working with other agencies is well established. Governors have made several new appointments to the school, including a family liaison officer and an attendance officer, to strengthen safeguarding further. Most of the pupils are brought to school by taxi. Their arrival and departure is well supervised. Swift steps are taken to check on the whereabouts of pupils who do not arrive as expected.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and governors have strong relationships with pupils and staff. The leadership team includes highly experienced teachers who use their expertise to

develop the practice of the wider staff group by sharing what they know works well.

- Your approach to improving teaching and learning by teachers coaching one another is resulting in better outcomes for pupils over time. Leaders have focused on refining the way that teachers introduce learning to pupils in lessons so that the progress they are expected to make is clear. These approaches are supporting pupils to make better progress but are not yet fully embedded across all phases.
- Disadvantaged pupils, including the most able, are well supported at The Kingfisher School. Almost all disadvantaged pupils made strong rates of progress from their starting points in the last academic year. The school evaluates the impact of pupil premium expenditure and focuses the majority of its resources on recruiting additional staff with specialisms that support pupils' needs. The school offers a wide range of therapies and additional lessons that respond to pupils' welfare needs and help diminish gaps in achievement.
- The school now receives the primary sport premium. Funding is used effectively to increase levels of participation in sporting activities both inside and outside school. Pupils have also recently enjoyed opportunities to stay away from home, visiting outdoor activity centres in Hereford and Devon. These opportunities greatly enhance pupils' overall confidence and build their social and emotional skills.
- Leaders have developed the curriculum to ensure that it engages pupils and meets their needs. During the inspection, pupils were observed responding positively to curriculum opportunities and teachers' questioning. For example, in a key stage 3 physical education lesson, pupils demonstrated a keen interest in volleyball. They responded very well to the teacher's questioning and instruction. The teacher successfully supported pupils in developing their technical skills and understanding of the game. In key stage 2, the wider curriculum is organised and taught through topics that make appropriate links between subjects. The younger pupils also make good use of the school's specialist facilities. I observed primary pupils making use of the school's new cooking area. Pupils had successfully prepared a range of peppermint creams decorated with drizzled chocolate.
- Changes to the curriculum are providing pupils with wider opportunities to gain qualifications by the time they leave the school. As a result, a higher proportion of pupils are now achieving well at GCSE and in vocational courses. A notable success is the number of pupils gaining a qualification in ICT in 2016. All of the pupils entered for the ICT qualification gained the equivalent of a GCSE grade A or above. As a result of the effective advice that they were given, every pupil who left Year 11 in 2016 has gone on to study academic or vocational courses in local colleges.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read in key stages 2 and 3. Pupils report that they are encouraged to read a range of books. The most able older pupils read with confidence and, when questioned, are able to demonstrate a clear comprehension of texts. Younger pupils use their growing knowledge of the sounds that letters make to help them work out words they do not know.

- Pupils that inspectors spoke to say that behaviour is improving at their school. They talk confidently and knowledgeably about a range of important matters such as e-safety and the dangers of drugs. One pupil explained that he had learned that drug misuse 'can affect your working ethic and the rest of your life'.
- Records of incidents of poor behaviour are carefully analysed by leaders. In the last academic year, there was an increase in incidents. Leaders identified that this was due to changes in their policy and procedures which they have since addressed.
- An officer has been appointed to support the school's drive to further improve rates of attendance. Where concerns are raised about the attendance of a pupil, representatives from the school conduct home visits. The school makes regular contact with other settings to ensure that pupils are safe and in attendance at any alternative provision. Rates of any unauthorised absence have fallen over time.
- The school receives effective support from partner schools within the multi-academy trust. Leaders have undertaken reviews in one another's schools to support the identification of agreed strengths and any areas for development. The trust has also arranged opportunities for leaders and teachers to share good practice.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching, learning and assessment improves further by ensuring that agreed approaches are embedded across the school
- plans precisely address the actions that will be taken to ensure that any differences in pupils' progress diminish over time.

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

Jonathan Keay
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with the leadership team to review the school's self-evaluation and development plan. Key lines of enquiry were devised as a result of discussions with leaders. Key lines of enquiry included: the extent to which leaders and governors have created a culture of safeguarding at the school; the level of challenge and support provided to disadvantaged pupils; the progress that pupils make across the curriculum; how well pupils are supported with careers guidance and further education; and what actions the school has taken to develop pupils' understanding of British values.

Inspectors observed lessons across the school. Some observations were made jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors heard pupils read in key stage 2 and key stage 3. During observations, inspectors spoke to pupils about their learning, behaviour within the school and how they are taught to stay safe.

Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's single central record, personnel files, child protection case studies, governing body minutes, analysis of attendance, details of pupil premium expenditure, assessment information and curriculum plans.

Inspectors met with one parent at the school gate after school, reviewed two free text responses and spoke to one family via the telephone. There were no responses to the pupil survey and insufficient responses to Parent View to generate feedback. Inspectors reviewed the 58 responses to the school's internal parent questionnaire which was conducted in September 2016.

The lead inspector met with the chair of the governing body and the executive principal of the multi-academy trust.