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Mr Christopher Wright
Principal
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Dear Christopher Wright

Short inspection of Christ Church Academy

Following my visit to the school on 15 February 2017 with Julie Griffiths, Ofsted Inspector, 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 school was judged to be good in December 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The school is lively, welcoming and supportive to its pupils and staff. There is a sense of purpose and creativity in the classrooms, outside learning spaces and corridors. You are proud of your school and seek to give your pupils resilience and confidence so they can learn new skills and knowledge. Inspectors saw evidence of this throughout the school, including in areas where improvement since the previous inspection is most marked, for example in boys' writing, science and religious education (RE). Pupils are proud of your school and speak supportively of their teachers, appreciating the help and guidance they receive.

You have worked hard to establish a multi-academy trust called The Key Educational Trust with two other schools. This work helps you share effective practice and resources. We saw evidence of the increasingly effective transition between your first school partners and your key stage 2 teachers leading to good outcomes in writing. Your governing body and trust members speak enthusiastically of the school and its future. They have a realistic and ambitious plan for the school and this helps improve the capacity of the school for further improvement. Accurate tracking and monitoring information supports your leadership so you can plan and evaluate effectively. Your self-evaluation document reflects this. It is not only a

record of what you have achieved but an honest appraisal of what you want to improve. Your development plan is robust and supported by clear evidence and targets.

Parents and staff are overwhelmingly supportive of you and your leadership team. They speak glowingly of your care, leadership and your teachers' detailed knowledge of their children. They acknowledge your unstinting support for their children's welfare. A typical response to the parent view questionnaire was: 'My experience is that parent feedback is listened to and acted upon – suggestions are met with openness and a willingness to take back, discuss and, if appropriate, action effectively.'

At the last inspection, you were asked to address three issues.

- You were asked to help pupils respond to teachers' support for their work. You have made improvements to the way teachers plan lessons. Many pupils record their next steps in learning or tell the teacher what they need to understand next. In key stage 3 mathematics lessons, inspectors found pupils using reasoning skills as a direct result of advice from their teachers. Where teaching is effective, teachers' explanations are clear and easily understood by their pupils.
- The report asked you to match teaching activities to pupils' abilities. Inspectors found evidence of this in the teaching of reading, for example. Now, you give pupils very clear advice on what books to read. Your librarian has developed plans for pupils to encounter challenging texts. Many pupils take up these challenges with enthusiasm.
- The previous inspection report asked you to have best teaching practice shared across the school. You have begun to do this, sharing, for example, sports teaching across the multi-academy trust. There is more to do here. Not all teachers of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are fully aware of these pupils' potential. So, some of their books show signs of incomplete work or a less than thorough effort.

Safeguarding is effective.

Procedures to ensure that pupils are safe are secure. There are rigorous systems for checking the recruitment of suitable staff. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves and others safe. The governing body is knowledgeable and up to date in its training and robust in its monitoring of school safeguarding.

Relationships between your staff and pupils are excellent, so pupils know in whom they can confide. You train staff and governors regularly and well in safeguarding and child protection. Your staff treat potential child protection incidents with a high degree of professionalism. The school works well with other agencies to keep children safe; this is particularly important for the small minority of pupils who are absent too frequently.

Inspection findings

- In 2016 your school met the government's floor standards in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 2. A significant majority of pupils who left in year 8 did so having met the standards expected of their ability in subjects across the curriculum and this includes the most able, disadvantaged pupils, boys and girls. Most pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities met the standards expected of their prior attainment in writing and science but fewer did so in reading. You have this aspect of the pupils' learning in your development plan and governors know it is a focus for further improvement.
- In 2016, in key stage 2, girls and lower-ability pupils' reading was not as strong as it should be. You have addressed this by supporting those pupils more effectively now they are in key stage 3; you have improved the teaching of reading in years 5 and 6 and inspectors could see from your tracking information, in books and lessons that there was greater engagement and interest in reading. The library, for example, is a real strength of the school, a centre for the reading competitions and celebrations of reading that you now regularly hold.
- In 2016, disadvantaged pupils in key stage 2 did not achieve what would you expect of their ability in mathematics. We could see during the inspection that these pupils are now back on track to achieve their expected outcomes. You have asked the local authority to work with your teachers to improve the curriculum; you have required teachers to improve the way they assess their pupils and developed the planning of mathematics teaching. This means that lessons more accurately match activities to the skills each pupil needs. So we could see that outcomes are now better than last year.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities in key stage 2 did not achieve as well as you expected in 2016. While this is improving, progress is not as secure as it needs to be for these pupils. Most pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities do go on to achieve expected outcomes in writing. In reading and mathematics, however, improvement has not been as marked as it has been for other groups of pupils. Your development plan and your self-evaluation have given this a high priority. Inspectors could see that the work of your special educational needs coordinator was having signs of success with these pupils. You now work more closely through the trust with your partner first schools to share information about these pupils and develop the teaching skills needed to address their needs.
- In 2016, boys' writing was better than would be expected nationally for pupils with similar prior attainment; this is because you have focused intensively on basic writing skills. You have found your pupils benefited from being shown clear structures, learning how language works and being assessed rigorously for spelling and punctuation. Attractive displays are a feature of your school celebrating the successes of pupils' reading and writing that pupils use and appreciate. Standards of boys' writing currently at the school continue to be strong in key stage 2 and key stage 3 and you are spreading the most effective practice to improve girls' writing at the same rate.
- In science, inspectors could see in lessons and books that outcomes are good.

This was reflected in your monitoring information. In 2016, standards were higher than would be expected of pupils with similar prior attainment in key stage 2. This is still the case and continues into key stage 3. You have invested considerably in resources and equipment for science. Your science teaching rooms are well appointed and teachers have a high level of professional knowledge. They teach enthusiastically and pupils appreciate this.

- Attendance is above national averages this year for all year groups except Year 7. You have worked hard to address persistent absence. There are a few pupils who do not attend regularly and these pupils are supported by your special educational needs team and the pupil premium grant. You have worked closely with the local authorities to address the issue supportively and robustly. It remains the case that a few pupils are not attending frequently enough.
- Outcomes for pupils are improving in the school. In key stage 3, most pupils in most pupil groups achieve the standards expected of their ability in reading, mathematics and science. Inspectors also observed effective learning in other areas of the curriculum such as RE, music and modern foreign languages. Pupils achieve well because activities were well planned and pupils could respond to the suggestions for improvement given by teachers. Pupils were challenged to think and reflect on their learning, for example in RE when the teacher gave time and support to pupils writing about the significance of religious imagery. Elsewhere, an English teacher carefully structured a piece of descriptive writing with her pupils so that they had the confidence to write freely. You monitor and evaluate teaching and learning regularly and your leaders use performance management to hold teachers accountable as well as to improve the training programme you offer. For example, you have improved the way teachers deliver mathematics reasoning skills to the most able pupils. Inspectors saw examples of students thinking in depth about how to apply mathematics practically in sustained and thoughtful project work.
- Your school is a place where pupils feel safe, encouraged and, in the main, challenged to achieve. Since the last inspection, there has been a greater consistency of better teaching and so outcomes are good for pupils. Pupils enjoy coming to school. Your teachers work enthusiastically as a team to give pupils a wide range of opportunities to develop their curiosity and confidence.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- improve the teaching of reading and mathematics so that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make at least good progress throughout the school
- accelerate the actions you are taking to improve pupils' attendance so that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those supported by pupil premium funding attend with increased frequency and regularity.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the executive board, the director of education for the Diocese of Lichfield, the regional schools commissioner and the director of

children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Graham Tyrer
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, 14 parts of lessons were observed and we looked at pupils' books in all these lessons. We also looked in depth at a range of work produced by pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Inspectors met with the principal, vice principal and other school leaders. There were meetings with members of the governing body and members of the Trust board. Inspectors met with groups of pupils and observed lunchtimes and break times. There were extensive documentation reviews, and a review of your website and its policies and statements.

We read staff and parent responses to questionnaires and Parent View. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire. There were 69 responses to the Parent View and 40 freetext responses; 28 responses to the staff questionnaire and five freetext responses.