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Mrs Lynn Evans
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Dear Mrs Evans

Short inspection of Abbey Park First and Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 17 October 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 school was judged to be good in September 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The effort and commitment of skilled leaders and governors have made sure that Abbey Park continues to provide its pupils with a good standard of education. The school has been through several changes since September 2013. The school federated with the adjacent middle school in September last year. At that time, you became executive headteacher of both schools and the acting deputy headteacher of the first school became head of school. The two schools share the same governing body.

You, together with other leaders and the governors, are determined that Abbey Park will continue to build on its strengths. The steps you have taken over the past year have made a positive difference to the school and the pace of improvement has clearly accelerated. In their questionnaire responses, all members of staff said that they are proud to work at Abbey Park and feel that their professional development is well supported. 'I love being part of the team', said one. There is a strong spirit of teamwork among staff and an upbeat, positive atmosphere around the school.

You and the staff achieve a good balance between promoting pupils' academic achievements and supporting their personal and social development. Several parents mentioned this in their comments, saying how well the staff help their children both to learn and to grow as individuals. A typical comment was, 'Children are nurtured in a safe, positive environment, while being stretched to achieve their

potential.' Relationships between staff and pupils are strong. The school environment is well organised, bright and inviting, both indoors and out.

Abbey Park has many strengths. The last inspection report highlighted the excellent quality of teaching and learning in the early years. This continues to be an aspect of the school's work that is especially strong. Recently, you have expanded Nursery provision to include full-time places and have opened pre-school provision for two-year-olds. The early years provision is very well led and there is strong capacity for even further improvement. Abbey Park has also achieved success in the teaching of phonics, which has become another of the school's key strengths. At 100%, the proportion of pupils who attained the expected standard in phonics at the end of Year 1 this year is considerably higher than that seen nationally.

Your self-evaluation accurately identifies the school's strengths and points out honestly where improvements are needed. For example, pupils' achievement in writing is not as strong as in other subjects, and this is a current priority. You also know that pupils' attendance is not as high as it should be. Individual action plans point to the next steps and the targets that you are working towards.

There is a happy, purposeful atmosphere in classes and around the school. Pupils are friendly and talkative. They behave well. In class, they willingly get on with what they are doing and respond readily to the staff who work with them. They talk confidently about their work and their learning.

The curriculum includes topics that capture pupils' imagination and stimulate them to want to participate and learn more. It is enhanced by visits and special events. During this inspection, pupils thoroughly enjoyed the 'circus skills' activities. They had great fun learning to ride unicycles, juggle and walk a tightrope, among other things. The activities were a great source of enjoyment but they also made a good contribution to pupils' learning. While taking part, pupils developed their physical skills and coordination as well as their perseverance. For example, pupils concentrated very carefully as they tried to balance a peacock feather on the end of their noses!

Leaders have successfully dealt with the areas for improvement highlighted at the school's last inspection. You have developed your own way of assessing and tracking the attainment and progress of different groups of pupils across the school. You analyse the information carefully and can see if some groups of pupils are not making progress at the same rate as others. Where this is the case, you take steps to make sure that pupils are supported to help them catch up. Your current assessment information shows that there are minimal differences in the progress made by different groups of pupils, apart from those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This group of pupils does not always make as much progress as others. This is another area of focus for the school.

The inspection report also asked senior leaders to improve the contribution of middle leaders to school improvement. The middle leaders who spoke to me used the word 'empowered' to describe how they feel about their roles. They spoke

enthusiastically about the range of activities they carry out as part of their responsibilities. Importantly, they feel that they have a say in what happens, are listened to, and are trusted and valued as colleagues. They also say that they can see where their work is making a difference to teaching and learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong safeguarding culture at Abbey Park. You and the governing body have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements, including the way that staff are recruited and their suitability checked, are fit for purpose. You and the other lead persons for safeguarding know the local area and its challenges well. You have effective systems to make sure that staff know what to look out for and that potentially vulnerable pupils are quickly identified. Where there are concerns, you take swift action to support these pupils, including making referrals to the local authority's 'family front door' where appropriate. You are tenacious in making sure that referrals are followed up and action taken where needed. You keep detailed and well-organised records.

You also make sure that the curriculum includes opportunities to teach pupils to understand risk and how to keep themselves safe in different situations, including online. Parents, pupils and staff raised no concerns about safety or behaviour.

Inspection findings

- Outcomes for children at the end of the Reception Year have continued to rise. This year, 80% of children attained a good level of development, slightly more than in 2016 and well above the national figure for this year. The children made strong progress from their starting points. This is because staff know the children very well and strive to make sure that every child does as well as he or she can. The environment supports children's learning very well, both indoors and out.
- Outcomes at the end of Year 2 are also improving strongly. In previous years, pupils' attainment at the age of seven has been broadly in line with that seen nationally. In 2017, however, the proportion of pupils who attained or exceeded the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was greater than the national figure. Those pupils who had attained highly at the end of Reception sustained their strong performance and all were assessed as exceeding the expectations for their age. The school's assessments were carefully checked and externally verified.
- Pupils are enthusiastic readers. The pupils who read to me did so with accuracy, fluency and expression. They were confident and clearly enjoy reading. They spoke of how they are supported to read at home as well as at school. Teachers and teaching assistants are skilled at teaching phonics, which stands pupils in good stead as they learn to read.
- There is clear evidence that standards are rising across the school, building from the younger year groups through to Year 4. Your assessments show that pupils in Years 3 and 4 do not mark time but continue to build well on their prior attainment. For example, all the pupils in last year's Year 4 made good

progress from their starting points. Pupils from the current Year 4 spoke to me enthusiastically about their work. They clearly enjoy what they are learning, especially in mathematics, which they said is their favourite subject. They showed me how tasks become increasingly challenging as they work through them. There was no sense that the pupils were not stretched or were marking time.

- Pupils take standardised tests in English, mathematics and science. This makes sure that the teachers' assessments of what pupils know and can do are correct. This means that the information that is passed on to the middle school is accurate and that time is not wasted on testing pupils again when they start Year 5. Teachers from both schools now work more closely together and share expertise. This contributes to a smooth transition and minimal interruption to pupils' learning.
- As mentioned above, there is still some work to do to make sure that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress at the same rate as other pupils. Some of these pupils are not currently catching up quickly on the standards expected for their age. You are also working on improving standards in writing across the school, starting from the Nursery. Consequently, these very young children are already developing a keen interest in telling and retelling stories.
- You have taken decisive steps to raise the profile of good attendance with pupils and their parents and families. You have appointed an attendance officer to make sure that this important aspect of the school's work is prioritised. The attendance officer is working with you to establish systems, procedures and policies that make the school's expectations crystal clear. She is working closely with families, providing support and encouragement where necessary, but also emphasising the consequences of persistent absence. She is working hard to get the message across to parents that every day at school counts.
- You have had some successes with improving the attendance of individual pupils, including those who are disadvantaged. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has reduced. However, although attendance is improving, it is not doing so rapidly. Consequently, it remains one of your priorities for improvement.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that, in line with the school's action plans:

- efforts continue to boost overall attendance and to reduce the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent
- teachers continue to strive to raise pupils' achievement in writing to standards that match those in reading and mathematics
- leaders review and further develop the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, to make sure that those pupils make faster progress and catch up more quickly on the standards expected for their

age.

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

Linda McGill
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

At the start of the inspection, I toured the school with you and met members of staff in their classrooms. I met with you and the head of school to discuss the school's self-evaluation and the areas of focus for the inspection. We also talked about current assessment information and the school's approach to safeguarding. I met three middle leaders and six members of the governing body. I also met the school's attendance officer.

I visited key stage 1 classrooms briefly to observe the teaching of phonics. I also visited the pre-school and the Nursery class. Four pupils from Years 2 and 3 read to me and showed me their reading records. Two pupils from Year 4 discussed their work with me and showed me their books. I observed pupils taking part in 'circus skills' activities in the school hall. I scrutinised the school's record of recruitment and vetting checks and other documents relating to safeguarding. I looked at the displays and pupils' work in classrooms, corridors and around the school. I examined documents, including action plans, information about assessment and attendance, and information on the school's website. I met several parents at the end of the day. I also took account of the 70 responses made by parents on the Parent View website, including free text comments, and a letter sent by one parent. I considered the views of 26 members of staff and 92 pupils who completed online questionnaires.