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Mr Robert Lane
Headteacher
Four Acres Academy
Four Acres
Withywood
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Dear Mr Lane

Short inspection of Four Acres Academy

Following my visit to the school on 13 December 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 predecessor school was judged to be good in February 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since becoming an academy. The school's core values of 'respect, aspiration, opportunity, nurture, resilience and enjoyment' are borne out in all aspects of school life. This was demonstrated clearly in the Christmas performances where pupils eagerly performed with confidence and pride.

The strong leadership at all levels, including governors, ensures that staff have the highest expectations of their pupils' learning and welfare. Leaders have a secure understanding of the school and are honest in identifying those areas which still need further work. You work closely with the Pickwick Teaching Schools Alliance and this ensures that the leadership is challenged appropriately. The school improvement plan is used well as a detailed framework for future developments. You and your deputy headteacher keep a close eye on how well pupils are learning through regular meetings with teachers where they are held to account for individual pupil progress.

Subject leaders play a valuable role in maintaining the good-quality education that the pupils receive. They have a clear grasp of what is working well and know what areas need further improvement.

Governors are justifiably proud of the school and always put the best interests of the pupils at the heart of their decision making. They use their professional expertise well to challenge the work of the school. Regular visits to the school

inform their own strategic view of how well the school is doing.

The close working relationships you have established with parents and the wider local community enhance the work of the school. The recent introduction of a technology programme, shared between home and school, has successfully increased parental involvement in children's learning. Parents appreciate the opportunities a regular forum provides for them to have their voice heard. They enjoy fund-raising for the school and find sessions such as 'stay and read' help them to support their children's reading skills.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Leaders are sensitive to the challenges and needs of the local community. Staff have completed all the appropriate training, in line with current legislation, and apply this training effectively to their daily work.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. The work of leaders, the family support worker and the special educational needs coordinator ensures that vulnerable pupils' social, emotional and academic needs are well catered for. They make timely referrals and work closely with specialist agencies to minimise children's risk of harm.

Pupils report that they feel safe and know that adults in school will help them if they have a worry or concern. They fully understand the importance of e-safety and are appreciative of the advice they receive from their local police community support officer (PCSO).

Using a wide range of rewards and sanctions, leaders have successfully improved overall attendance rates. They are fully aware that there still remains a very small, but stubborn, minority of families who fail to send their children to school regularly. Leaders aim to rectify this through the changes to the school timetable which are being introduced next term.

Inspection findings

- To ascertain that the school remained good, a key line of enquiry was about how the school was improving the proportion of pupils passing the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1.
- You are fully aware that over the past two years, results in the Year 1 phonics screening check have declined. Children make good progress in reading and writing in the foundation stage. However, staff turbulence has affected the consistency and precision of the teaching of phonics in Year 1. You have addressed this by retraining teaching staff and providing opportunities for them to observe best practice in other schools. You and your leaders have also ensured that there is a more structured approach to the teaching of phonics and a greater parity with the way that the children are taught these skills in Reception.

- Although phonics is taught in discrete sessions, there is now a greater focus on making it part of a wider toolkit to support the teaching of reading. You and your staff have also worked hard to engage the parents more in helping their children to learn to read. In particular, the 'stay and read' project, where parents stay for a short session to share books with their children and promote the love of reading, has been a resounding success.
- I also wanted to check how well the children were progressing in Nursery and Reception. This is because the proportion of children who met a good level of development in the most recent end of key stage assessments was below the national average.
- The proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the time they leave Reception has been steadily improving over the past four years. Children do particularly well in their personal, social and emotional development and gain confidence using their physical skills. Nevertheless, you are fully aware that there is an inconsistency in the progress made across all the areas of learning and this limits some children reaching a good level of development. You are putting in place procedures to check that there is a greater consistency of progress across the areas of learning.
- Given that the proportion of pupils who reached a higher level than expected in the most recent Year 6 national tests for reading, writing and mathematics was below average, I explored how the school was ensuring that the most able were being fully challenged.
- You are fully aware of the need to maintain the challenge for your most able pupils. Teachers know who these pupils are but recognise that, until recently, they did not always pitch the level of learning high enough. You have swiftly responded to the findings of a recent external review. Changes have been made to the curriculum and teaching staff have a better awareness of ensuring that it provides breadth, depth and revision which suitably stretches and challenges the most able. Teachers report that the greater emphasis on talking about their learning is successfully extending these pupils' vocabulary. Coupled with this, exciting visits and trips are planned to widen their experiences and contribute to a greater depth of learning for these pupils. There is also a sharpened focus on using the school's feedback policy to challenge and motivate the pupils as learners.
- My final line of enquiry was the decline in the progress made by Year 6 pupils in mathematics, as highlighted by the most recent national test results.
- You recognise that although pupils are confident using and applying their mathematical skills in different situations, they lack the ability to access key multiplication facts quickly enough, especially in test situations. You are rectifying this by ensuring that pupils learn to use and apply their multiplication skills quicker. The popular annual themed enterprise competition, where classes plan a project, such as to make an item within a budget which can be sold at a festival, has been recognised as an effective way to further develop the pupils' multiplication skills.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the strategies introduced to improve the teaching of phonics are carefully monitored so that pupils' progress in these skills is consistent
- the proportion of children reaching a good level of development continues to improve as a result of greater consistency across the areas of learning
- the most able pupils continue to be fully challenged
- pupils continue to gain more confidence in using and applying their multiplication skills in mathematical problems.

I am copying this letter to the chair of directors of the Little Acorn Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bristol. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and your deputy headteacher and discussed improvements made since the school became an academy and the school's self-evaluation. I looked at the safeguarding records and explored your recruitment and vetting procedures. I also held discussions with two governors, including the chair of directors of the Little Acorn Trust. I met with five middle leaders and three members of staff who have responsibilities for safeguarding. Together, we visited classes and looked at the pupils' workbooks. I spoke to some parents who were attending the key stage 1 Christmas performance. I took account of four responses from Parent View, the online inspection questionnaire, and considered the comments that had been submitted by text. I also took into consideration the questionnaire responses from 15 members of staff.