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Mrs R J Maund
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Maund

Short inspection of Holmer CofE Academy

Following my visit to the school on 10 January 2018, 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 leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice in certain areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Leadership of the school at all levels is characterised by your unwavering commitment to provide the very best for each and every pupil, every day, no matter what. To that end, you are never satisfied that you have done enough and are always striving to provide extra quality. For example, you are seeking to help pupils who speak English as an additional language build more quickly on their knowledge and skills in different subjects while acquiring English as swiftly as possible.

You lead the school with quiet, calm determination. You expect the best from your staff and support them well to meet that challenge. You help new teachers adopt your effective policies quickly or, as you put it, 'To get on the Holmer bus.' You then ensure that they consistently follow the required procedures. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved substantially since the previous inspection. This has driven up standards notably.

You are outward looking. You seek to learn from the best practice in other schools. You welcome challenge and the opportunity it brings to reflect on and improve the

way things are done. At the same time, you are rightly proud of the school's many strengths.

You are ably supported by your deputy headteacher and a highly skilled team of middle leaders. Pupils benefit as a result. For example, the special educational needs coordinator assesses pupils' difficulties quickly and accurately. As a result, pupils who require specialist support receive it promptly. Pupils who just need to catch up are soon spotted and given the help they need. This is one reason why all groups of pupils make impressive progress.

Following the previous inspection, you and your team unpicked the inspection report to identify precisely what would make the difference. Your actions were very effective. For example, pupils now take much greater responsibility for their own learning. This is because you trained teachers to guide pupils carefully to spot errors and make improvements to their work. Pupils use the same approach to support one another's learning

When you introduce something new, you plan it carefully and set out exactly what difference you expect it to make. You check closely to see if it is working. You are not afraid to change or abandon anything that is not having the desired impact. This is why the school continues to improve strongly.

Subject leaders support you well in checking the quality of teachers' work. Where necessary, they provide high-quality and timely support that helps iron out any issues. This ensures that pupils' progress does not lose momentum.

Governors have a clear sense of purpose: to hold the school to account for providing the very best for its pupils. Governors are inquisitive. They ask pertinent, challenging questions. Governors test out your assertions about the strengths of the school by visiting lessons, meeting with staff and talking to pupils. In this way, governors have a clear and accurate view of how well the school is doing. As with other leaders, there is no sense of complacency. Governors believe that the school can always improve and willingly look for ways of helping it to do so.

You actively seek to broaden pupils' horizons and equip them for adult life in Britain. You ensure that pupils develop a strong work ethic, along with the confidence to have a go and the resilience to keep trying when things become tricky. You ensure that pupils have contact with people from different religious backgrounds. However, you recognise there is more to be done to enable pupils to appreciate fully the cultural diversity in wider society.

The school is a calm, friendly, supportive community. Pupils feel well cared for and valued. They learn how to protect themselves from dangers they will face as they grow up. Parents and carers appreciate the lengths staff go to for the benefit of their children. They say the school is a special place that their children are lucky to attend.

Safeguarding is effective.

- Leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Pupils' safety and well-being are the first priority of all the adults who work in the school. No concern is too small to be taken seriously. Every incident is logged quickly, considered carefully and followed through meticulously.
- The school is tenacious in communications with the local authority so as to ensure that no piece of the jigsaw is ignored that might prevent a child from being protected.
- The school works productively with other agencies to ensure that pupils and their families get the support they need quickly.

Inspection findings

- Results in last year's national assessments for Year 2 and Year 6 were above the national average. Evidence from this inspection shows that pupils in all year groups make strong and sustained progress in a wide range of subjects. Consequently, the high standards achieved in recent years are improving further.
- No groups of pupils achieve less well than others. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. Nevertheless, leaders analyse assessment data to look for indications that the school might do even more to support particular pupils. This is how they spotted that there may be a way of helping pupils who speak English as an additional language to acquire skills more quickly than they do at present.
- The school hosts an annual event which brings pupils from local schools together with teachers who come from four different religious backgrounds. This is a very worthwhile experience. However, leaders recognise that this event alone is not enough to promote a deep understanding of different cultures, beliefs and ways of life. Pupils do not know enough about religions beyond Christianity.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they build on the work already done to promote awareness of different religions to strengthen pupils' appreciation of the rich and diverse nature of modern British society
- pupils who speak English as an additional language lose no time in building on their knowledge, skills and understanding when they first join the school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Hereford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Herefordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sandy Hayes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with: the headteacher and deputy headteacher; other school staff; a group of governors, including the chair; and a group of pupils from Year 6. I spoke on the telephone with the school's improvement partner. I spoke informally to pupils in lessons. I looked at the 52 responses to the Parent View survey. I visited lessons with the headteacher and looked at the work in a selection of pupils' books. I considered the school's self-evaluation and its plans for development. I took into account pupils' standards of attainment and rates of progress. I read a range of documents, including those related to safeguarding and child protection.