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Mr Simon Robertson
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Dear Mr Robertson

Short inspection of Withington Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 7 March 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 March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and the leadership team understand the challenges and benefits of leading a small school. Parents and carers appreciate the close relationships that exist between the school and families. They are particularly appreciative of the head of learning, who they say is exceptionally approachable and seen as an asset to the school.

The school is part of a federation. This alliance works to secure the school's future stability and ensures that the pupils, particularly, benefit from being within a small school, but have access to opportunities beyond what could normally be expected from a small school. The governors describe this as 'the best of both worlds'.

You and the leadership team know the school well and lead it with energy and a clear sense of purpose. The school has a strong sense of the values that underpin its work. Children, their well-being and their educational outcomes are at the heart of all the school does. This is seen as a goal that requires everyone to work in collaboration with openness and honesty. This is reflected in the school's mission statement of 'achieving excellence together'.

Pupils with whom I spoke are justifiably proud of their school. They really enjoy coming to school. Pupils' behaviour is a strength of the school as they are kind and caring towards each other. Older pupils support younger ones in many ways, including arranging playground games for them. Pupils' attitude to learning is

particularly notable. They come to lessons expecting to learn and work hard. As a result, their approach to learning plays a large contribution to their success in the many opportunities that are afforded them by the school.

The previous inspection report identified the need to improve handwriting. This has been tackled with vigour, to the extent that handwriting should now be considered a strength of the school. The presentation of work in the pupils' workbooks is consistently immaculate. Writing is neat, accurately formed and beautifully presented. There is a true sense of pride in their work, which reflects the unswerving high expectations from leaders and teachers.

The previous inspection also noted that there was a need to improve the accuracy of match of challenge for pupils within lessons. You and other leaders have focused hard on developing more accurate systems of assessment, which enable teachers to understand pupils' learning needs. Alongside this, leaders have ensured a deeper focus on setting work that meets individual needs so that each pupil is now challenged with work that is neither too hard nor too easy.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. These procedures are overseen by a leader within the federation and are consistent across the three schools. They are robust and highly effective. The school uses an online recording system. All documentation is thorough and is easily accessible to those who need it.

Staff understand their responsibility in keeping pupils safe. They undertake appropriate safeguarding training, to make sure they are up to date with the most recent guidance. Training records are carefully maintained, so that refresher training can be provided in a timely way.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and say that it is a safe place, where poor behaviour and bullying are rare. They are confident that adults in the school will help them resolve any difficulties they may have. The curriculum includes opportunities for pupils to learn about how to keep safe. They know how to protect themselves when they use the internet and through the 'Be Safe Be Seen' campaign they understand the importance of road safety.

Inspection findings

- I focused some of the inspection activity on considering the quality of writing across the school. This was because in 2017 pupils did not achieve as well in writing as they did in reading and mathematics, although writing results were still in line with national figures. Evidence in pupils' workbooks demonstrates pupils are given many opportunities to write extensively. Writing skills are systematically taught and then drawn together in extended pieces of writing. For example, pupils in Years 5 and 6 have been taught about the structure and features of effective newspaper reports. They are able to explain the difference between fact

and opinion. During the inspection, they were using this knowledge to write their own newspaper report based on a book they had read.

- Pupils have studied texts from different eras and have developed a good awareness of text styles. There is some evidence of adventurous language choices. However, pupils could be given more opportunities to evidence deeper thinking about sentence structure and vocabulary choices, by explaining those choices and the desired effect on the reader.
- Leaders have addressed concerns about standards in phonics through focused training. Consequently, there has been a significant improvement in phonics teaching. The proportion of pupils who passed the phonics screening check in 2017 dramatically increased from the 2016 results. Pupils are able to apply their knowledge when reading and systematically use phonic strategies to help them decode unknown words.
- You identified attendance as a concern for the school and have analysed attendance data to establish the rates of attendance for groups of pupils within the school. The small numbers of pupils involved mean that a few pupils can make a large difference to the figures. You have identified the pupils with the lowest rates of attendance and have been vigilant in challenging poor attendance. The excellent relationships that exist between leaders and families have enabled the school to have direct and candid conversations about the importance of good attendance. This has improved the attendance of those pupils.
- Leaders are mindful that there is a lack of diversity within the school. They do provide opportunities for pupils to mix with pupils from other schools. However, more could be done to ensure that pupils have opportunities to meet and understand people from very different backgrounds to their own.
- A final focus for the inspection was the extent to which being part of a federation impacts on the quality of education provided by the school. Inspection evidence demonstrates that leadership has been strengthened. The head of learning, who has responsibility for the day-to-day running of the school, is supported in her role by you and your highly effective deputy headteacher. This provides a great deal of additional professional and leadership experience. Staff also benefit professionally through having links to other members of staff within the federation who bring particular expertise. Leaders use the expertise within the federation strategically, so that outcomes for pupils are improved. Pupils profit from specialist teaching in physical education (PE), modern languages and music. They enjoy the opportunities to participate in federation events, such as sports tournaments.
- There is one governing body for the federation. Governance has improved since the last inspection and is now strong. Governors are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities. The governing body has undertaken a skills audit, and so is able to use the skills of its members to fulfil its leadership role within the school. An external review of governance, which was carried out in April 2017, supports inspection findings that governors offer effective challenge to leaders within the school. Governors know the school well because you ensure that they are well informed about the strengths and areas for further development in the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is a continued focus on promoting deeper thinking skills of reasoning in writing, which involves pupils justifying and explaining how they make an impact on the reader
- further opportunities are provided for pupils to find out about the different ways of life for people from contrasting backgrounds, cultures and areas to their own.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Davies
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the deputy headteacher and the head of learning. I also met with other members of school and federation staff as well as members of the federation governing body. I also spoke to your local authority adviser. Together with leaders, I planned the key lines of enquiry for the inspection. I visited classes in the school with the deputy head to observe pupils' learning, speak with them and look at their books. We looked at an extensive range of current books from each year group. I also spoke with pupils at breaktime and during the day. I spoke with parents at the start of the school day and considered 11 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I looked at a range of documentation, including information about the work of the governors, safeguarding and attendance. I also scrutinised and discussed the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement.