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Mr Matthew Maund
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Dear Mr Maund

Short inspection of Almeley Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 22 May 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 January 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 staff team are successful in realising the ambitions of the school which headline the school's website, 'Inspiring children to become independent and responsible thinkers'. You and the senior teacher provide strong and effective leadership of this small, rural primary school. You both lead by example and have gained the respect and trust of pupils, parents, carers, staff and governors. There have been good improvements since the school's previous inspection. The work that you and governors do through the soft federations or partnerships with the cluster of local schools is also helping to sustain improvements by enabling staff to share best practice.

Leaders, staff and governors have maintained very warm and positive relationships with families. This is an inclusive school where pupils of all abilities achieve well, including those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. The very small number of pupils taking national tests each year makes it difficult to judge trends over time reliably. However, assessments and pupils' work in books show that they make good progress in phonics, reading, writing and mathematics in relation to their starting points.

The senior teacher has led by example to help address an area for improvement, reported at the time of the previous inspection, to improve pupils' writing. The standards pupils reach in writing have improved and increasingly more pupils learn to write in greater depth. However, there is still scope to build on this by making sure that pupils have more opportunities to improve the quality of their writing.

There are some good examples of pupils' extended and independent writing displayed around the school and in books. However, pupils who are capable of reaching or exceeding age-related standards often write sentences using limited vocabulary. We discussed the possibility of focusing more on extending vocabulary in lessons. Your current focus, as reflected in the school improvement plan, is starting to have a positive impact and you described this as 'talk for writing'. During our meetings and joint observations of lessons, we agreed that teachers could still do more to provide opportunities for pupils to read aloud, recite stories or use role play activities so they experience a greater breadth of vocabulary.

Parents are right to say that the school is having a very positive effect on their children's personal and academic development. Pupils are exceptionally well behaved and attentive, and they treat each other with respect and dignity. One of the best examples I saw of this was during the assembly you led, where you asked a pupil to improvise a character's role as part of the moral of a story about honesty. Pupils observed and contributed very much to the assembly. The school makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. I had a delightful meeting with a group of older pupils, who were mature and responsible ambassadors for the school. I asked pupils questions about how safe they feel and why they like their school. Like other pupils I met during the day, one summed up the views of most by stating, 'Everyone really cares about you here and we can always find friends if you are worried or need help.'

You and the governing body have coped very well with the many staff changes since the previous inspection. You have recruited intelligently by appointing strong practitioners to teach and lead different aspects of the school's work. The staff are keen and positive about the work they do and they value pupils' work and efforts. Another area for improvement cited at the time of the previous inspection, and which you have addressed very well, was to ensure that responsibilities for managing the curriculum and other aspects of the school were better delegated to the staff team. The school improvement plan reflects this very clearly. Staff who manage different aspects of the school's work, such as SEN provision or the curriculum, evaluate accurately the impact of actions they have taken to improve standards and teaching.

You recognise, rightly, that the next priority for improvement is to optimise opportunities for pupils to use information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum. The improvement plan sets out the actions taken and those planned for the near future. Pupils are using tablets and computer devices to support writing when using word processors or when finding information using search engines. However, I agree that control technology and programming are relatively weaker areas of the school's taught curriculum.

The two governors I met with explained the rationale leading to the opening of your new Nursery, 'Little Elms', in September 2017. This accommodates two-, three- and four-year-olds and provides flexible pre-school and childcare provision for families. This has been successful and the children are settling in very well, including the small number of two-year-olds. The indoor and outdoor areas are due for expansion

shortly as you and the governors, rightly, recognise the need to provide more stimulating resources for the children. The current indoor space is safe and clean but looks a bit cluttered in places because of the limited space available. The plan to extend provision, ready for September 2018, is the right one. There is now a need to provide more space and a broader range of large and small equipment for the children so that two-, three- and four-year-olds are sufficiently engaged and stimulated.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and robust. Staff vetting is rigorous and includes systematic checks on visitors, volunteers, governors and supply staff. The indoor and outdoor areas are clean, safe and secure. The Nursery and the class accommodating Reception children meet the early years welfare requirements. Staff ratios for two-year-old children meet the required standard and all early years staff are suitably qualified in all aspects of provision, including paediatric first aid and childcare. Pupils know what to do to keep themselves safe when using the internet or mobile devices. Risk assessments of resources and school activities are carried out routinely. The staff are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities. Safeguarding and child protection training is carried out systematically. As you know, I checked the school's attendance procedures and the measures taken to deal with persistent absenteeism. You and the staff team manage this area well and work closely with vulnerable families, including those who are hard to reach. The vast majority of pupils attend school regularly and on time. You make sure that pupils are safe if not attending school by regularly keeping in touch with families. The vast majority of parents, rightly, believe that pupils are safe in school.

Inspection findings

- As it is a very small school, the staff adapt their lessons and plan tasks well to take account of the mixed-age groups they teach in all three mainstream classes. In addition, a significant number of pupils join the school at different times to the usual entry points in the new Nursery or the Reception Year. Teachers and support staff accommodate these potential difficulties very well and provide effective support and interventions which are tailored to meet pupils' needs and abilities.
- Parents are very pleased with what the school provides for their children. Many parents told me that they moved their children from other schools because of the strong reputation you and the staff team have established. Two particular comments by parents represent the views of most. One parent stated, 'My children have settled into this school because the staff and headteacher really care for them.' Another commented, 'This is a lovely school because the staff really value and respect our children.'
- You and your staff have maintained a strong and stimulating curriculum. Special topics or events, such as musical ensembles and instrumental tuition run by the Herefordshire music service, as well as plays and performances and a broad range of sporting activities and opportunities to explore woodlands and the natural environment, motivate and enthuse pupils. In addition, educational visits

and visitors provide rich and stimulating experiences which are reflected in some good-quality displays of art and records of special visits to places of interest. The current focus to improve ICT provision further is the right one. Pupils have a reasonably good understanding of basic word processing and the skills needed to use electronic devices and tablets. However, they are less knowledgeable about programming.

- The good foundations laid in the Reception Year prepare children well for key stage 1. Pupils are taught phonics well and this accounts for their good achievement and progress in reading throughout the school.
- The Nursery, Little Elms, is now well established and is increasingly popular with families. However, resources are not yet stimulating enough for the youngest children. You have some good plans to improve these, as well as providing more indoor and outdoor spaces for the children to learn and play.
- Teachers and support staff intervene well to help pupils as they write, encouraging them to correct punctuation and spelling mistakes. You and the senior teacher have led by example to improve pupils' achievement in writing as this has been a relatively weaker area compared with reading and mathematics. There is still scope, however, to improve the quality of pupils' independent and extended writing so they use a broader vocabulary. The most able pupils and those capable of reaching age-related standards could be writing still more extensively and often, to learn how to write in greater depth and complexity.
- The partnerships or soft federations established with four other local schools are helping you and the staff to moderate and compare standards. You and the senior teacher lead by example and governors are also utilising these partnerships to share best practice with other schools.
- There have been improvements to the curriculum since the previous inspection. For example, there is much more evidence now, compared with previously, of pupils writing about topics covering the full range of the national curriculum. The previous inspection referred to a lack of writing or work on humanities subjects. Clearly, this has improved, as work displayed, and in pupils' books, shows that they have studied and written about interesting historical topics, such as the Vikings or the Second World War. The pupils I met with explained very eloquently the inhumane treatment of Jews during the Second World War and also referred specifically to 'The Diary of Anne Frank' to illustrate this. This also demonstrated very well how effectively pupils are taught core British values of respect, tolerance and acceptance of all faiths, beliefs and customs.
- There is very effective governance and clear lines of accountability which are reflected in the questions that governors pose during their meetings. The recent minutes I scrutinised show that governors challenge you and the staff to explain pupil outcomes and the actions taken towards your stated aims. Strong governance has been maintained since the previous inspection.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- There is a continued focus on improving the teaching of writing, to sustain the rise in standards achieved by pupils, by:
 - building on the strong practice that exists so that teachers and support staff see and share best practice
 - providing even more opportunities for pupils of all abilities to write at length independently
 - extending pupils' vocabulary to help those capable of reaching or exceeding age-related standards to write more varied sentences.
- They build on the work started to extend facilities in the Nursery for two- to four-year-olds so the children have access to more stimulating indoor and outdoor resources.
- They improve pupils' use of information and communication technology across the curriculum, particularly the programming aspects.

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

Charalambos Loizou
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you throughout the day's inspection. I also met with the vice chair and a former chair of the governing body. We visited all three classes and the Nursery together; we observed teaching, looked at pupils' work in books and spoke to pupils during lessons. I checked that the new Nursery was clean and safe and considered the extent to which it meets national standards in terms of early years welfare requirements, particularly for two-year-olds. I observed you leading a school assembly and met with a group of pupils in Years 5 and 6 to discuss their views about the school, as well as their work and progress. I spoke to some parents at the start of the school day. There were too few responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, for me to consider. I scrutinised the school's improvement plan and leaders' evaluations of the school's work, as well as some governor minutes and headteacher reports to governors. I analysed national assessment information to consider pupils' attainment and progress. I checked staff vetting and safeguarding procedures with the school's business manager to determine whether the school's arrangements for safeguarding are effective.