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Miss Maggi Newton
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Dear Miss Newton

Short inspection of Pencombe C of E Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 2 October 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 October 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You became executive headteacher in September 2017, as the school began to receive support from the Herefordshire Marches Federation of Academies (HMFA). Since that time, the school has improved rapidly, having previously declined somewhat since the last inspection. HMFA provides highly effective support in many areas, including leadership, safeguarding and provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.

You have instilled a strong team ethos across the school. Governors and staff are committed to seeing the school improve, and they are proud to work at Pencombe. Parents are appreciative of your leadership and of all that staff do to support their children. Almost all parents and carers who responded to Parent View said that the school is well led and that they would recommend it to another parent. One summed up the views of many when they wrote: 'My child enjoys going to school, and is being well looked after. If I have any worries, I know I can speak to the teachers.'

Over the last 13 months, you have successfully addressed the areas for improvement which were identified at the previous inspection. Teaching has improved. The most able pupils are challenged in lessons, while lower-attaining pupils receive excellent support. Provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is now of a high quality. Indeed, the care and support which staff provide for pupils are strengths of the school.

You know the school well, including its remaining weaknesses. For example, some pupils' use of correct grammar, punctuation and spelling is not as strong as it ought to be. Additionally, curriculum plans for subjects other than English and mathematics are not as well thought through as in those core subjects.

Governors are very committed to the school. They have appropriate expertise and, consequently, provide good support and challenge to leaders. Over recent years, the governing body has been instrumental in stabilising the school and setting it on its current trajectory of improvement.

Safeguarding is effective.

All staff understand their responsibility to keep pupils safe. Because you have trained them well, staff are alert to the signs that pupils might need extra help. They pass on to leaders any concerns they have, secure in the knowledge that they will be dealt with speedily and appropriately.

Safeguarding is well led and HMFA provides high-quality expertise and support in this area. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records relating to child protection are detailed, well organised and stored securely.

All parents who responded to Parent View, and with whom I spoke at the start of the day, said that their children feel safe in school. All staff who completed their Ofsted inspection questionnaire agreed. During the inspection, I spoke with many pupils. All said that they feel safe and well cared for in school. They told me that there is no bullying in school and that pupils are kind to each other, with older pupils looking after younger ones. They know how to keep themselves safe from a range of potential dangers, including those that might arise when using the internet.

Inspection findings

- The first area which I considered during the inspection was the effectiveness of the school's curriculum. During the last year, leaders have focused on ensuring that the core curriculum of reading, writing and mathematics is well planned. They have been successful. Pupils grow in knowledge and understanding through a well-sequenced curriculum. A strong focus on improving basic skills is proving effective, especially in mathematics. Here, pupils become fluent in their use of arithmetic, while routinely having to solve problems and explain their reasoning. They develop a strong understanding of mathematical concepts as a result. However, some gaps in pupils' knowledge remain as a legacy of weaker teaching in recent years. This is particularly the case in pupils' use of grammar, punctuation and spelling, which is not as good as it ought to be, especially in key stage 2.
- Leaders' planning of the curriculum in subjects other than English and mathematics, is not as well developed as in those core areas.
- Although curriculum plans are in place for subjects including science, history and geography, they currently do not ensure that pupils' learning always builds

coherently on what they already know and understand. Mixed-age classes provide an additional challenge to making sure that pupils' learning in these subjects follows a logical sequence.

- The formal taught curriculum is very well supplemented by a wide range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities. These include educational trips, residential visits and several after-school clubs. Joint activities with other HMFA schools provide many opportunities for pupils which would otherwise not be available in a small school. The school's curriculum, as a whole, is effective in helping pupils to develop into confident, articulate young people.
- The inspection's second focus area was on how well teaching supports pupils of different abilities. Teaching is effective across the school. Teachers plan activities which are well matched to pupils' different abilities. Expectations are high, and the most able pupils are challenged to extend their learning. For example, I observed pupils having to prove and disprove mathematical statements. Equally, teachers and teaching assistants provide good support for pupils who find learning more difficult. This takes the form of highly personalised work and additional equipment and resources. Consequently, these pupils attempt tasks and understand what they are studying.
- The final area which I considered was the school's provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. This provision has improved considerably since the previous inspection. It is another area where support and expertise from HMFA has proved invaluable. Leaders accurately identify special educational needs, and they work closely with parents and carers when making decisions about provision for individual pupils. Teachers and leaders keep a close eye on these pupils' progress, stepping in with extra help when necessary.
- Leaders give teachers detailed and helpful information about pupils' individual needs and about how to adapt teaching to meet these needs. Teachers and teaching assistants provide excellent support in class for all pupils and especially for those who have SEN and/or disabilities. Work is carefully planned for these pupils. Class teaching is supplemented by extra, often one-to-one, help for pupils who need to catch up with some aspect of learning. As a consequence of strong teaching and high-quality support, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make similar good progress as the other pupils in the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils continue to improve their use of correct grammar, punctuation and spelling
- learning is as well planned in other subjects as it is currently in English and mathematics.

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

Alun Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the chief executive officer of HMFA, the head of school and other members of staff. I visited several classes with you, where we observed teaching and learning, and spoke with pupils about their work. I talked with many pupils in lessons and at breaktime. I met with three governors, including the chair and the vice-chair of the governing body. I spoke over the telephone with a representative of the local authority. I scrutinised several documents, including your self-evaluation, your school development plan and safeguarding and child protection records. I talked with several parents as they dropped their children off at the start of the school day. I considered the 33 responses to Parent View, including the 14 free-text comments and the six responses from members of staff to the online inspection questionnaire.