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Mrs Di Smith
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Smith

Short inspection of Abbeywood First School

Following my visit to the school on 13 November 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in March 2011.

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 and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

This was the first visit since the school converted to become an academy in March 2016. The leadership structure has evolved to include an executive headteacher, a head of school supported by a deputy headteacher and three phase leaders. There is a joint local academy governing board shared with the middle school and based on the same site. The school received national teaching school status in May 2018 and the executive headteacher is a national leader of education.

'Curiosity – the key to unlock learning' is the belief held by each member of staff in the school. Over time, you have created a very strong team of reflective professionals who are making a difference to the pupils they work with. You and the senior leaders are ambitious for what your pupils can achieve not only in your school but also throughout their education to 19 and beyond. As a result of work across the multi-academy trust, all staff have an excellent understanding of what pupils need to be able to do to be successful in the next stages of their education.

You have a highly effective partnership with the head of school and, together, you empower and encourage leaders, staff and pupils to be creative. No one is stifled. Everyone is encouraged. This culture runs from trust board level right through to the pupils. A climate for learning is tangible throughout the school. You ensure that new practice is rooted in evidence by participating in research and engaging with other providers to share good practice. Staff value, and make the most of, the training opportunities provided through local network meetings or, for example, studying for a national professional qualification.

All staff reflect, review and refine their practice. This contributes to the highly effective provision across the school. The curriculum you have developed over time is dynamic and highly stimulating. It provides children with the skills and knowledge they need to be successful. Expectations are high and basic skills are developed at every opportunity. Pupils' progress is strong, and the majority of pupils reach the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics. An increasing number reach the higher standards. As a result, outcomes for pupils at every stage have risen continually over the last four years and are regularly above national averages.

Governance is highly effective. The scheme of delegation enables governors to use their wealth of skills and experience to hold leaders to account. There are clear lines of accountability, ensuring that there is no conflict of interest in the roles individuals hold. There is transparency between the trust board, the executive principal and the local academy governing board. For example, the post of chair of governors is no longer combined with being a trustee as has been the case in the past. Governors know the school well and are ambitious for its continued development. They are astute and discharge their duties diligently.

Pupils are extremely well behaved and polite and show respect to those around them. They talk about their school enthusiastically. They are exceptionally keen to talk about their learning and relish the challenges it provides. Pupils have very positive attitudes to school. The majority of parents and carers are very supportive. They appreciate the support their children receive and recognise the good progress they make over time. Many parents appreciate the guidance they are given about how they can best support their child at home with their learning. However, there is more to be done to ensure that all parents are fully involved.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the leadership team have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. You know your families well and have an extensive knowledge of the issues facing the local community. The designated safeguarding leads work effectively with a range of external agencies to ensure that timely support is provided to vulnerable children and their families. They ensure that a culture of vigilance is embedded among all staff.

Governors regularly check that processes are followed correctly. Record keeping is comprehensive and appropriate and helps track the impact on children of actions taken. Thorough checks are undertaken when recruiting new staff and a structured

induction process helps them to fully understand their responsibilities. You ensure that all staff are regularly trained in safeguarding and know what to do if they are concerned about a child. They are able to recognise the potential signs of child abuse, child sexual exploitation and radicalisation and extremism.

The curriculum teaches pupils to develop their understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Personal safety, well-being and resilience are threaded through the school's work. Pupils say that they feel safe at school. They trust adults to help sort out any anxieties or worries they may have. This is echoed by parents who commented on, 'the warm positive relationships which help pupils develop confidence,' and the fact that, 'teachers know the children and support them well.'

Inspection findings

- Attendance has been below national averages for the last few years. I wanted to explore what leaders are doing to develop positive attitudes to learning and good behaviour, and to ensure that pupils attend more regularly. As a result of the dynamic, stimulating curriculum developed over time, pupils from Nursery to Year 4 are highly engaged in their learning. Pupils develop confidence in their ability and welcome the challenges posed by teachers. For example, comments such as, 'Oh gosh, this is hard' come from pupils relishing the challenge to think very deeply about their current task; they do not give up easily. Pupils are keen to be in school to continue their learning.
- Leaders are tenacious in following up any absence from school. First-day calling, text messages and home visits are used effectively to check where pupils are when not at school. Meetings are held with the families of pupils whose attendance gives cause for concern. As a result, attendance rates have risen to their highest ever over the last four years and are now just above national averages. The proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school has also fallen and is now below that found nationally.
- Pupils are aspirational and behave well. They understand what is expected and enjoy the rewards used to encourage good behaviour. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the 'zone board'. They are proud to reach the gold zone or to go one better and have their name on the ceiling or on the headteacher's door. Those who need additional support with their behaviour are managed well. The Willows nurture provision retains a very strong focus on learning. It helps pupils develop skills and knowledge as well as the social skills they need to be successful.
- The second aspect I looked at was provision for the youngest children in school. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development is lower than that found nationally. However, evidence gathered shows that this represents good progress from very low starting points. Effective routines enable children to settle quickly and build positive relationships. The learning environment encourages independence from the outset. Any child who requires additional support is given it immediately so that they do not fall behind. Progress is strong for all children and the number of children reaching a good level of development has increased steadily over time. Leaders are keen to ensure that this continues to rise so that even more children reach a good level of development.

- Adults are remarkably skilled in engaging children in highly appropriate learning activities. They know just when to intervene to deepen learning and when to step back and allow children to think for themselves. Adults' use of questioning and the extensive, complex vocabulary they introduce children to are exceptional. It is not made simpler or easier just because these are the youngest children. This helps children make connections, explain what they are doing and become deeply engrossed in their learning. For example, during the inspection, children exploring which material was suitable for building a bridge over a river made a link to the story of 'Three Billy Goats Gruff'. Early years provides a good start to school.
- Leaders have raised expectations of what pupils can achieve and this is contributing to more pupils reaching the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders are focused on ensuring that as many pupils reach the higher standards in writing as they currently do in reading and mathematics. Language development is given the highest priority in school. All adults are extremely skilled in developing vocabulary, knowledge and understanding. Teachers skilfully build up sequences of learning, so that pupils have extensive knowledge of a subject before they begin to write. This enables pupils to write fluently with increasing detail and accuracy.
- Technical and physical skills for writing are developed from when children start school. Adults model how to form and join letters correctly and expect pupils to do the same. Pupils are rightly proud when they are presented with a 'pen licence' for accurate work. Pupils identified as being at risk of not reaching the higher standards benefit from highly effective additional teacher support. For example, Year 3 pupils work closely with a teacher, ensuring that they build on their success at key stage 1. No learning is lost in the transition into key stage 2 and more pupils are now securely working at greater depth in writing.
- The focused drive to improve outcomes in mathematics has resulted in more pupils mastering basic number and calculation skills. 'Five drops a day' activity ensures that there is a focus on using mathematics throughout the day and provides pupils with regular practice. As a result of high-quality training for all staff, adults are highly skilled in helping pupils to deal with mistakes and misconceptions. Pupils' confidence in their own mathematical ability has grown. They see themselves as mathematicians, explaining and proving what they know.
- Leaders ensure that a range of effective interventions is used to support any pupil struggling with their mathematics. Working with individuals and small groups, adults model skilfully and clearly, ensuring that pupils consolidate their knowledge. As a result, pupils' progress improves, as does their enjoyment of mathematics.
- The school has a high number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Many have significant medical and healthcare needs, and social and emotional needs, as well as delays with their learning. They are managed effectively and included in the school by the whole staff team. Individual pupils' needs are met through a variety and range of support, including opportunities for same-day catch-up. Leaders continually check on the impact of the support on pupils' progress to ensure that it is making a difference. Where it

is not making a difference, leaders quickly make changes to the support provided. Consequently, many pupils with SEND make strong progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to build on the strong relationships that exist with parents, so that every child can achieve at the highest standard
- even more children reach a good level of development in early years.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the executive principal (who is chief executive officer), the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Worcestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Nicola Harwood
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I held discussions with you and other leaders about the significant changes to the school since the last inspection, the school's self-evaluation and areas for further development. I shared my key lines of enquiry with you. I met with members of the local academy governing board, including the chair. I spoke with the executive principal and a member of the Central RSA Academies Trust, as well as an external school improvement consultant. I considered the 33 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire, as well as the 18 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire. I carried out learning walks with senior leaders. During these, I spoke with children and discussed what they were doing. I met with parents before school started and considered the 23 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the free-text service.

I reviewed a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and development plan, minutes of governing body meetings, monitoring and training records and those documents relating to the school's arrangements for keeping children safe.