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Mr Paul Hyde  
Alcester Academy  
Gerard Road  
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Warwickshire  
B49 6QQ

Dear Mr Hyde

### **Short inspection of Alcester Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 13 March 2019 with Rob Steed, HMI, 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 2015.

### **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.

You and your senior team, along with your middle leaders, provide exceptionally strong leadership to the school. An inclusive culture where every child matters is evident in the school. This philosophy is shared by all staff. Staff value the highly approachable and caring nature of your leadership team, but also say that they are rigorously held to account. Leaders have an honest and accurate view of the strengths of the school and the areas for development and are not afraid to tackle any issues head on. You have developed a climate of trust and staff feel developed and an intrinsic part of the future direction of the school. In such a small school, leaders at all levels are used very effectively to support whole-school priorities.

The school is extremely calm and orderly, with pupils exhibiting exemplary behaviour. Pupils love their school. They are extremely proud of being part of the school community and feel valued and supported. They are genuinely appreciative of the excellent teaching and support and guidance they receive, and the opportunities they are afforded. For example, many pupils talked enthusiastically about becoming literacy and numeracy leaders. They wear their uniform with pride and speak confidently about the 'special' place they think their school has become.

Older pupils have seen the journey the school has been on. One said that, 'it is the

best that it has ever been'. Pupils attend well and want to be at school. Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school and are proud to be part of its community. One parent summed up the views of many when they wrote, 'the headteacher is very visible and makes every effort to engage with parents'. Staff were equally positive in their responses to the Ofsted inspection survey.

Outcomes for pupils have been consistently high over the last few years. The relentless focus on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has meant that pupils make substantial and sustained progress in the vast majority of subjects. There is a well-developed and effective system of monitoring the quality of teaching and learning across the school and you are creating a culture where increasing numbers of staff routinely reflect on their own practice and work together to learn from the very best.

Governors are extremely committed to the school. There is a wide range of skills among members of the governing body. They speak proudly about the progress the school has made and how it now has an excellent reputation in the local community. Governors are able to identify the strengths and areas of development for the school and hold leaders to account. They are fully aware of their statutory duties related to safeguarding and to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

While outcomes for the vast majority of subjects are strong, the progress made by pupils in modern foreign languages is not as strong as in other subjects. You recognise this and are taking decisive steps to improve the leadership and quality of teaching and learning in this area.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding is a strength of the school. You and your staff are extremely pupil centred and there is a happy and harmonious atmosphere. All safeguarding procedures are robust, and highly effective systems are in place. There is regular training and updating for staff and their knowledge is tested on safeguarding arrangements. Staff are well versed in using the school's systems to communicate any concerns they may have about pupils' safety or welfare. Staff are swift in dealing with any concerns by liaising with the appropriate agencies.

Pupils feel extremely well cared for and supported at the school. When talking to inspectors, pupils stated that they feel safe in school and know where to go if they have any issues. One pupil said that teachers in the learning support unit are like a 'deputy mum'. The school regularly provides information to pupils about how they can keep themselves safe, including on the internet. This is done through tutor time, assemblies and 'super learning days', which are welcomed by pupils. Pupils say that bullying is extremely rare and when it does occur, it is dealt with swiftly and effectively.

### **Inspection findings**

- The inspection team firstly considered how effectively the curriculum meets the needs of all learners. The curriculum is broad and balanced and includes a range of courses to suit different pupils. Pupils say that it helps them to consolidate their knowledge, skills and understanding and teachers build in time to revisit prior learning. Outcomes are strong across the vast majority of subjects, although the number of pupils taking the range of subjects at GCSE that make up the English Baccalaureate is low compared with the government's benchmark. You and your leaders recognise this and have taken swift action to remedy it. As a result, the number of pupils taking the appropriate range of subjects at GCSE is rising.
- Middle leaders are heavily involved in developing the curriculum in their subject areas. The curriculum in key stage 3 is being reviewed to ensure that all pupils acquire the knowledge, skills and understanding to be successful at GCSE and in the wider world. Teachers benefit from working together to plan lessons. There is a comprehensive programme of training for teachers to learn from each other and further develop their craft.
- You and your leaders have developed very effective systems to monitor the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Through your model of 'MER' (monitoring, evaluation and review), you are able to identify excellent practice and build on it. It also enables you to diagnose any issues of underperformance and to act swiftly to address it. This has resulted in extremely high performance in the vast majority of subjects. Teachers are also able to spot quickly any pupils who are having difficulty and introduce robust plans to support them.
- Inspectors also considered how teaching provides challenge for all pupils, and particularly for the most able pupils. Inspectors observed highly effective levels of challenge in the vast majority of lessons they saw. For example, in a geography lesson, Year 10 pupils were discussing the Irish backstop Brexit issue and how it affect physical geography. In a Year 7 art lesson, pupils were able to talk confidently about their work on Georgia O'Keeffe and how they were using the features of her work to improve their own drawings.
- There is a culture of high expectation in lessons. Pupils are encouraged to aim high and teachers do not accept mediocre answers. Instead, they push pupils to extend their responses. This means that pupils are far more confident in developing their answers in written assessments and examinations and, as a result, make even better progress.
- Support for the most able pupils is highly effective. The focus on developing the idea of 'mastery' across different subjects has been very successful. This has resulted in further improving outcomes for the most able pupils across the school. These pupils benefit from a range of opportunities to aspire to be the very best they can be, including working with outside speakers from Cambridge and Warwick universities.
- The final area the team investigated was the action the school is taking to improve outcomes in modern foreign languages. Historically, outcomes in this subject have been low. At times, in this area, lessons lack pace and challenge.
- Pupils are not as confident in developing their answers in these lessons as they

are in other subjects. Progress in pupils' books does not show the same level of rigour in modern foreign languages and there are fewer opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in writing at length. Leaders are acting decisively to address underperformance in this subject and are creating opportunities for teachers to work across the school to identify good practice. As a result, progress is improving in modern foreign languages, albeit more slowly than in other areas of the school.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching in modern foreign languages improves to match the excellent outcomes in other subjects and to enable more pupils to make better progress
- the numbers of pupils taking the range of subjects at GCSE that make up the English Baccalaureate continue to rise
- teachers continue to work together across subjects to share excellent practice in teaching and learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Neil Warner  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, we met with you and other staff, including those responsible for safeguarding. Inspectors visited lessons and spoke to pupils about their work and their lessons. Inspectors evaluated a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and development plan and minutes of governors' meetings. Inspectors took the views of school staff into account through the 45 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. The views of parents were considered through the 134 responses to Parent View.