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Mr Steve Payne
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Payne

Short inspection of Halesowen CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 14 March 2017, 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 inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in February 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have kept the successful focus on the school's ethos: 'The school aims to serve its community by providing an education of the highest quality within the context of Christian belief and practice.' Pupils learn about the beliefs and behaviours of the Christian faith, and develop a broad understanding of the views and values of others. You have continued to make sure pupils benefit from a well-considered range of learning in classrooms, after-school clubs and school trips. This is because you and staff are ambitious for pupils to develop the many skills and abilities they need for their life in modern Britain.

You have made sure the school is welcoming and friendly. There is a very keen emphasis upon providing support to families so that they feel confident to work together with staff. You provide extra help and assistance wherever it is needed. Many parents commented that they value highly the individual support they receive. For example, one parent said: 'My son is in his last year and I don't know how we would cope without the incredible support system. I cannot praise the school enough.'

Parents are very positive about the school's work and a great majority say that they would recommend the school to others. Their views are summed up in a typical comment: 'My son loves going to school. He is encouraged to do his best and the school is a happy environment to learn in. The school is well led with a clear vision.'

The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and behaviour is a strength. Pupils are confident learners, well equipped for their lessons and settle quickly to their work. Nearly all books are neat and tidy. Pupils enjoy helping each other when working together on tasks and activities. They rise very well to challenge and persevere even when they are finding the work difficult.

Outcomes have remained good since the last inspection. From their different starting points, the majority of pupils in all year groups are making good progress and working at the expected standards for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. An increasing number of pupils are working at, or moving towards greater depth in key stages 1 and 2.

You have addressed effectively the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. You have developed a new assessment system. Consequently, staff plan more effectively to meet the needs of pupils from their different starting points. There is a good pace established in lessons. The large quantity of work in pupils' books indicates that no time is wasted. Standards have risen at the end of key stage 1. However, you are mindful that for pupils with the potential to achieve at the higher standards, the picture is mixed, and could be further improved. The plans you have put in place are already leading to improvement in this area and more pupils are now on track to achieve at greater depth.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. When concerns about children arise, the relevant procedures are followed speedily and in detail. Leaders seek relevant expertise where appropriate to ensure the pupils' needs are fully met. Leaders make sure staff are well trained and kept informed of issues that may affect children such as neglect and sexual exploitation. Staff know how to record and refer any concerns they may have about the welfare of pupils or adults.

Governors understand their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding and regularly monitor whether school procedures are being followed. You and your leadership team have a good understanding of the specific safeguarding challenges that relate to the context of the school. Staff are alert to issues including extremism and radicalisation.

Messages about safe behaviour are covered well through regular information on the website for pupils and their parents. Good information and regular lessons about internet use mean that pupils have a clear awareness of how to stay safe while online.

Inspection findings

- You, along with the deputy headteacher, have been successful in creating an ambitious and aspirational culture throughout the school. Staff morale is high. As a result, the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes has remained good since

the last inspection. Governors, leaders and staff have supported the school well on its journey and have a strong capacity for continued improvement.

- Teachers are held to account for the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make in their classes. Leaders regularly monitor teaching, and cross-reference these observations with checks on pupils' work. They mentor and coach staff effectively to develop their skills and improve their teaching practice.
- This inspection had a focus on the progress pupils make, especially in Key Stage 2. In mathematics, pupils are making good progress. Pupils manipulate numbers confidently and accurately, applying their understanding to solving problems and investigating patterns of number. Standards in the quality of pupils' writing have improved and pupils are making good progress across the school. Pupils are able to write confidently for different purposes and audiences. Teachers are developing pupils' grammar, punctuation and spelling well.
- The highly effective teaching of phonics has ensured that pupils can build words well and develop their early reading skills confidently. Pupils with different abilities read fluently and with understanding to the inspector. They used their phonics skills well to pronounce unfamiliar words accurately and could answer questions about key characters confidently. Pupils enjoy reading stories such as 'Viking adventure' and non-fiction books from an early age.
- Pupils also make good progress in a wide range of subjects, in addition to English and mathematics. In science, pupils learn to conduct different investigations with increasing independence. They understand the need for a fair test, make sensible predictions, measure accurately and draw appropriate conclusions. In history, pupils learn about the cultures and important events in a wide range of countries.
- The school's careful expenditure of pupil premium funding to enhance staffing is giving disadvantaged pupils much extra help in their learning. This was a key focus of this inspection. Such support is enabling disadvantaged pupils to make increased progress. Staff plan their work carefully to help pupils overcome any likely barriers to their learning. Pupils learn they each have talents and abilities that will be given an opportunity to flourish. Disadvantaged pupils are increasingly taking up the additional learning activities the school offers to all pupils. As a result, almost all disadvantaged pupils are making good progress across the school because they are attempting harder work and succeeding. Consequently, differences in attainment and progress between these pupils and that of others nationally have diminished.
- The progress children make through the early years was another line of enquiry for this inspection. Many children start early years with skills and knowledge below those typical for their age and some well below. High quality assessments provide the early years leader with a very clear understanding of the children's needs. As a result, the children receive swift input to support their development and they make rapid progress. By the time they leave the Reception class, the large majority of children achieve a good level of development and are ready to join Year 1 as confident learners.
- Teachers present children in the early years with activities that grab and hold their attention, encourage cooperation and conversation, and fuel their imaginations and inquisitiveness about the world around them. For example, in

the Reception class, children came in to see the giant footprints on the carpet. They discussed together the relative size of the giant's footprint compared with their own. Children wrote well-constructed notes to the giant, such as: 'To the giant, please tidy up the classroom' and, 'Please don't eat me.'

- In a small minority of teaching the work set is not at the right level of difficulty for pupils. When this happens pupils' learning slows down because the tasks are too easy and they are ready for more demanding work. Consequently, this limits the amount of progress pupils make.
- Pupils' attendance was a further line of enquiry. The efforts made by leaders to promote regular attendance continue to be effective. The school has been successful in encouraging vulnerable groups of pupils to attend regularly. Leaders are working with families to reduce further still the absence of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' attainment rises further by making sure that teachers consistently set work which presents the right level of challenge to enable pupils to make even stronger progress
- the overall absence of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is further reduced.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Nelson
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and the deputy headteacher. We visited lessons and jointly scrutinised pupils' work. I also met with the chair of the governing body and another governor. I talked to some parents as they brought their children to school. I considered the 11 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and looked at free text comments from parents. I listened to some pupils read and also spoke with pupils in lessons. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school. I looked at a number of documents, including: information about pupils' achievement; your school self-evaluation; the school improvement plan; attendance and behaviour records; examples of school records

about the care and protection of pupils, and other documents relating to safeguarding.