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21 April 2017

Mrs Rachel Barnes, Head of School
Mr Simon Stubbs, Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Barnes and Mr Stubbs

Short inspection of Hallow CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 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 short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in February 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The reason for the school's continued success was captured incisively in a comment made by one of the many parents who wrote to the inspector in praise of the school. The parent stated, '[the school's] strap line "Learning to love & loving to learn" is intricately woven throughout the heart of everything it does.' This unstinting pursuit of leaders' vision creates a climate in which staff do all they can to ensure that pupils are safe and happy, and that they achieve well.

Consequently, this is a school much loved by its pupils. They feel very safe and extremely well supported by staff. The pupils who showed me round were fiercely proud of their school. They could not praise their teachers highly enough for the care shown to them and the quality of teaching they receive. Three of these pupils have previously attended other schools. Universally, they were of the opinion that they are much happier here, are learning well and are lucky to have made the move.

Pupils are friendly towards one other and develop very positive relationships with staff. Adults model behaving respectfully to one another and to pupils. This sets the tone for the deep mutual respect that permeated all interactions observed during the inspection.

Leaders at all levels take a strategic approach to school improvement, using all available information to help them identify, prioritise and plan the next steps for the school. Decisions are driven by what will be best for the pupils. The effective partnership between you both, as executive headteacher and head of school, provides strong leadership. You jointly ensure that you have a clear and accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for further improvement. The school gains considerable benefit from being part of the 'Astley and Hallow Federation' and working closely with the other partner local primary school.

Governors' very clear understanding of their strategic responsibility is underpinned by a working knowledge of operational matters. However, governors are careful not to let day-to-day issues divert them from a planned, coordinated approach to developing the school. Even when unforeseen circumstances arise, governors demonstrate a measured response, keeping the bigger picture in sight, while taking the short-term actions necessary to support leaders in maintaining the high-quality provision they believe pupils deserve.

All leaders confidently use assessment information to build an accurate picture of strengths and areas for improvement. This evaluation is used to focus effort and resources to where it is most needed to achieve best impact. For example, leaders monitor the impact of the pupil premium funding by checking frequently the progress of each eligible pupil. Changes to each pupil's programme of support are made in response to these checks. This is why these pupils often make rapid progress. As a result of this effective use of funding, differences between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and that of their peers are diminishing.

Leaders are always looking for just that extra little bit of improvement. Following the previous inspection, leaders unpicked and systematically tackled the identified areas for improvement. Leaders are not complacent about their success. They have continually revisited and reviewed the actions taken, adapting and adjusting, as needed, to maintain and build upon improvements achieved. During this inspection, leaders were keen to take on board my comments. They see how these relate to their own analysis of data and show clear understanding of how to move these areas forward.

Safeguarding is effective.

Policies and procedures for safeguarding are fit for purpose and robustly applied. This ensures that pupils' safety and well-being are kept to the forefront of the school's work. Where concerns are identified, rigorous procedures are followed quickly and thoroughly. This means that child protection is taken seriously and appropriate action is taken, including the seeking of advice from external agencies where necessary.

Pupils appreciate the time, effort and resources invested into their safety. They know that staff will listen if they have concerns. They talked about how the school is helping them to build necessary knowledge and resilience to keep themselves safe as they take their next steps in education.

Inspection findings

- Leaders had identified that the attendance of pupils from a small number of families dropped notably last year. School staff work sensitively with parents who are experiencing genuine difficulty bringing their children to school regularly and on time. Nevertheless, leaders have made it clear to parents that low attendance is unacceptable and that, where necessary, legal action will be taken to ensure pupils attend frequently. This has raised parents' awareness of their responsibilities and has had a positive impact on attendance.
- Leaders' close tracking of the achievement of different groups of pupils shows that disadvantaged pupils are making progress at least in line with other pupils nationally. In some cases, disadvantaged pupils are progressing more rapidly in English and mathematics than their peers. This helps them catch up any lost ground and ensures that they attain in line with the expected standards for their age by the time they reach the end of Year 6.
- Most pupils in the school are suitably challenged in lessons. This is why they achieve well. However, inspection evidence shows that some pupils who have attained high standards in the past are not sufficiently well challenged. This means they do not go on to demonstrate the higher degree of understanding one would expect of them. For example, some tasks in mathematics lessons require pupils to spend time repeating what they can already do. When this happens, pupils do not move on to harder work quickly enough. This is limiting the development of their mathematical reasoning skills.
- Pupils' writing shows a similar picture. Pupils learn about a wide range of grammar, punctuation and sentence types. Nevertheless, as they move through the school, some do not apply these skills as effectively as they should, given their high starting points. Consequently, by the time they reach the end of Year 6, the proportion of pupils able to demonstrate writing skills that go beyond those typical of most 11-year-olds is lower than the school would like to see.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils apply an increasingly sophisticated range of grammar, punctuation and sentence types to their writing as they move through the school, leading to an increase in the proportion of pupils who can write in greater depth by the end of Year 6
- work given to the most able pupils in mathematics lessons ensures that they learn to reason mathematically with confidence.

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 Worcestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sandy Hayes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with the head of school; the assistant headteacher; other school staff; a group of pupils; and a group of governors, including the chair. I spoke informally to pupils in lessons. I looked at the 62 responses to the Parent View survey. I visited lessons and looked at the work in a selection of pupils' books. I considered the school's self-evaluation and its plans for development. I took into account pupils' standards of attainment and rates of progress. I read a range of documents, including those related to safeguarding and child protection.