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Mr Peter Elmy
Fairlands Middle School
Masons Way
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Dear Mr Elmy

Short inspection of Fairlands Middle School

Following my visit to the school on 22 September 2015 with Tom Winskill, Her Majesty's Inspector, 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 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, alongside other leaders and governors, are highly ambitious and communicate a 'can do' attitude to both staff and pupils. Staff and pupils understand what is expected of them and work tirelessly to be successful.

The school is a calm and purposeful place. Pupils are overwhelmingly positive about their school and wear the uniform with pride; pupils look smart and arrive at school well prepared to learn. Classrooms are stimulating learning environments where pupils benefit from strong working relationships with staff and each other. Pupils are confident to ask questions and relish being challenged to think more deeply about their learning; they take pride in their work and appreciate their teachers' enthusiasm and support.

You have successfully addressed the areas identified in need of further improvement at your previous Ofsted inspection. Arrangements to hold staff to account for pupils' progress have been strengthened significantly. Pay awards are more closely linked to the progress pupils make. Teachers told us that, while targets are challenging, it has helped to raise expectations across the school. Teachers' planning takes into account

effectively the differing needs of pupils. As a result, learning activities usually provide pupils with a good level of challenge and support. In particular, disadvantaged pupils and those entitled to pupil premium funding are much better known by staff. The pupil premium champion monitors the progress of these pupils very closely. She provides timely and effective extra support where necessary; the progress these pupils make has risen quickly and the gap between their outcomes and those of their peers has narrowed significantly. The recent implementation of a marking and feedback policy enables pupils to receive more frequent feedback from their teachers on what they have done well and how they can improve. Pupils talk positively about this and showed us good examples of how they have improved their work as a result of following their teachers' advice.

The implementation of a revised curriculum is effectively raising pupils' outcomes across the school. Leaders have embraced the freedoms of assessment without levels and the revised National Curriculum to develop learning, which requires the pupils to 'master' key concepts and ideas. Through observing lessons, scrutinising books and speaking to pupils, it is evident that pupils have a much deeper understanding of what they are learning. For example, in a mathematics lesson, pupils were multiplying powers of numbers by adding the indices. When questioned, pupils could explain why this rule worked and were able to prove it; this demonstrated a strong conceptual understanding of the mathematics they were learning.

You maintain, rightly, a high priority on providing teachers with effective training to further develop the quality of their teaching. Teachers' developmental points are accurately identified and they are well supported to improve, through observations of the most effective teachers both within the school and in other schools.

Safeguarding is effective.

- The school has created a very clear culture in which safeguarding pupils is of paramount importance. Staff at the school are fully aware of signs which may indicate that a pupil is at risk. Procedures for alerting the designated safeguarding lead in the school are comprehensive and followed with precision when needed.
- The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that records are detailed and of high quality. Pupils identified as 'at risk' are meticulously monitored by the designated safeguarding lead who provides staff with necessary and relevant information.

Inspection findings

- Despite the 'good' judgement at the previous inspection, you and other leaders and governors have shown a great determination to bring about further improvements. School staff share this ambition and you have created a very cohesive and harmonious school.

- Staff are firmly held to account for the quality of their teaching. Where underperformance is identified, comprehensive support is provided. However, where improvements are not apparent, you take swift and decisive action.
- Leaders' evaluation of the school's performance provides an accurate identification of the strengths and areas in need of further development. High quality plans are in place to ensure the school improves further; clear evidence exists of leaders' capacity to bring about these improvements.
- Governors provide an appropriate balance of both support and challenge to leaders; they share your ambition to improve further. The school became part of The Mendip Edge Federation in January 2014, alongside three first schools. One governing body shares responsibility for all four schools. As a result of this, governors have a much better understanding of pupils' progress from early years through to the end of Year 8.
- You receive helpful visits from within the Federation and through strong local partnerships of schools to evaluate key aspects of your school. This provides you with affirmation of what is going well but also identifies very clear next steps to bring about further improvements. You benefit from visiting other schools to carry out this review process as you gain a thorough understanding of judging the impact leaders' actions have on the quality of education a school provides.
- Pupils told us that they feel safe and are happy at school. They speak positively of staff at the school, and have an adult they would speak to if they had a problem. Pupils behave very well. The proportion of pupils who have received a fixed-term exclusion has reduced significantly and is very low.
- The transition process from Year 4 into Year 5 prepares pupils well emotionally for the move. However, some of the work seen in Year 5 lessons, particularly in mathematics, does not provide pupils with sufficient challenge. The transition process does not always identify what pupils can and cannot do, which results in some slowing of progress. The quality of work seen in books in other year groups, however, shows that pupils make very good progress and are well prepared for their transition to Year 9.
- Leaders recognised that disadvantaged pupils, those eligible for free school meals or who are in the care of the local authority, have made less progress than their peers in the past. A wide range of effective support has been implemented to help develop these pupils' social, emotional and academic skills. Leaders do not, though, have a clear enough analysis of the impact of each individual aspect of this support to determine which is most effective.
- Most parents who responded to the Parent View online survey felt that their child is happy at the school, safe and well looked after.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- teachers understand what pupils can and cannot do when they start at the school in Year 5, to enable them to plan learning, which ensures that pupils make at least good progress, particularly in mathematics
- they evaluate the impact of extra support provided to disadvantaged pupils to understand what works well and why.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Simon Rowe
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, we met with you, other leaders, members of the governing body and a group of pupils. We also spoke to pupils during lessons and scrutinised the quality of their work.

We made short visits to lessons to observe pupils' attitudes to their learning and to discuss with teachers their understanding of pupils' progress and safeguarding procedures.

A wide range of documentary evidence was considered, including records relating to safeguarding, the quality of teaching, external reviews conducted on the school, assessment information and the school's analysis of attendance and behaviour.