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Mrs Lisa Appleton  
Headteacher  
Barrs Court School  
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Herefordshire  
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Dear Mrs Appleton

### **Short inspection of Barrs Court School**

Following my visit to the school on 8 March 2016 with Sue Lewis, Ofsted 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 your predecessor school was judged to be outstanding in May 2011.

### **This school continues to be outstanding.**

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the predecessor school's last inspection. There have been many changes in the last four years. The school became an academy in May 2013. You joined the school as headteacher in January 2015. You are the fourth headteacher in four years. All of the senior leadership team are new to post since the last inspection. Over half of the governing body has changed, including the Chair of the Governing Body and the Chair of the Academy Trust. There has been an increase in the number of pupils on roll. A building programme has been completed to accommodate the increased number of pupils. Post-16 provision is now delivered off-site within a short distance of the school at 'The Hub'. You, your leadership team and governors recognise that, approximately 18 months ago, the provision for pupils and learners dipped below the high standards expected.

Since your arrival you have tackled the issues relating to the effectiveness of leadership and management and the quality of learning, teaching and assessment. Members of staff unanimously agree that your inspirational leadership has led to rapid improvements. One member of staff spoke for many when he said that the school now provides a higher quality of education and support than the predecessor school. Staff share your vision, passion, ambition and high expectations. Inspectors agree with staff that Barrs Court School provides a highly effective education for its pupils and learners. One parent summed up the views of many, saying 'Barrs Court School teaches pupils real skills for real life living.'

As the new headteacher, you strengthened the school's already excellent care, guidance and support for pupils. Your focus on improving pupils' academic and social development is relentless. As a result, the majority of pupils make significant and sustained progress in reading, writing and mathematics, and in social, employability and workplace skills. Pupils and learners enjoy school, engage positively in their learning and show a clear determination to achieve success. Pupils' attendance is above the national average and there are very few pupils who are persistently absent (missing more than 10% of days from school).

Members of the relatively new governing body have a broad range of skills and expertise so they are able to support and challenge the school effectively. For example, governors' financial expertise enables them to have a clear understanding of how the pupil premium grant and Year 7 catch-up fund spending has impacted positively on eligible pupils' progress. Governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have achieved this through regular visits to the school, links with classes and an expectation that school leaders provide them with regular updates on pupils' progress. Governors have acted successfully to resolve the issues causing the school's dip in performance 18 months ago.

You know your school well. Your evaluation of the school accurately identifies the strengths and weaknesses. You use this evidence to inform appropriate action plans that focus on immediate priorities and more long-term developments. You ensure staff are accountable through regular checks on performance and suitable appraisal and performance management. The vast majority of staff are appreciative of your guidance and support and for the wide-ranging training opportunities which they say have improved their practice. You challenge underperformance. As a result, some members of staff have left the school.

You recognise the need to improve aspects of leadership and management still further. For example, you recognise that a few leaders' action planning is not informed by a detailed and painstaking analysis of the information they have about pupils' and learners' progress.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leadership of this aspect of the school's work is strong. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality. School leaders and staff are committed to safeguarding the pupils in their care. All staff receive appropriate safeguarding training, including on how to protect pupils and learners from the risks of radicalisation and extremism. Pupils are safe and know how to keep safe from potential risks and dangers. They know who to go to if they have a worry or concern. Pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they feel safe in the school, that pupils' behaviour is typically excellent and that bullying incidents are rare. Pupils' understanding of how to keep safe is supported through a comprehensive programme of personal, social and health education. This programme includes e-safety, travel safety, stranger danger and risks in the home and workplace. Pupils and learners are also taught about the rights of other people to have their views, possessions and personal space protected.

School leaders and a number of governors have completed safer recruitment training. The checks on the suitability of staff to work with children are thorough and detailed. The school site is safe and secure. Detailed and thorough risk assessments have been carried out for in-school and enrichment activities.

Referrals to the local authority and other external agencies are made in a timely manner. Records are kept meticulously and securely. Safeguarding leaders rigorously follow up any concerns or issues with appropriate authorities. Pupils' absence is routinely checked and referrals are made to the local authority Children Missing Education team if the school has any concerns about a child's long-term absence.

## **Inspection findings**

- You quickly and rigorously tackled the underperformance you identified when you arrived at the school in January 2015. You are well supported by an effective and determined leadership team. As a result, pupils and learners do extremely well academically and socially from very low starting points.
- Leaders and governors have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Many of the leaders are able to use information about pupils' progress effectively. However, a few leaders are not routinely analysing the evidence about pupils' progress in order to intervene quickly when issues arise.
- Governors are ambitious for the school. They have regular training and take part in local governor network meetings. They have a broad range of knowledge, skills and expertise and use these to question leaders' assertions about all aspects of the school's performance. They have a clear understanding of what the school does well and what it needs to do to improve further. A governor with responsibility for safeguarding ensures that the school complies with all safeguarding requirements including the safe recruitment of staff. Governors review and ratify the majority of the school's policies. However, a few of the policies have not been reviewed and uploaded to the school's website in the timeframe stated in the policy.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and personalised to meet the needs and ambitions of individual pupils and learners. Pupils achieve success in a range of accredited qualifications including 'Life and living skills', functional skills in English and mathematics, 'Skills for independence and work' and information and communication technology. Pupils have additional opportunities to gain awards through an exciting enrichment programme that includes the 'Arts Award', 'Home Cooking Skills' and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their next steps in education, training or employment. Where appropriate, all pupils in Key Stages 4 and 5, and a few in Key Stage 3, participate in work experience. Pupils learn to be independent and how to cope with problems when they arise. Pupils and learners in all year groups receive helpful careers information, advice and guidance. All of the pupils and learners leaving the school at the end of Key Stage 4 and 5 were successful in finding further education, training or employment. Pupils' literacy and

numeracy skills are developed well and pupils are able to apply their skills in a range of contexts. You rightly recognise that a few learners who join the sixth form from other providers do not do as well as those joining from Barrs Court School. This is because their needs are not always quickly identified and appropriate provision speedily put in place.

- Pupils' health and medical needs are met through a wide range of support that includes physiotherapy and mobility classes, speech and occupational therapy.
- The school actively promotes British values through the curriculum, assemblies and visits. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school.
- The quality of learning, teaching and assessment over time across the school is outstanding. The atmosphere in classes is calm and purposeful. Pupils work diligently on a range of activities that help them to meet individual learning targets. Almost all pupils take great pride in their work. Routines are well established. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do, know and achieve. Pupils rise to this challenge and, as a result, do exceptionally well given their very low starting points. Pupils' needs are met through teachers' ability to use a range of appropriate and effective teaching strategies such as signing, using visual cues and language that is simple and specific. Teaching assistants are skilled and make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning and understanding. Pupils receive appropriate, useful and effective written, verbal and nonverbal feedback. This helps them understand where they have made mistakes and what they need to do better.

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

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- all the school's policies are reviewed within the timeframe identified in the policy and uploaded to the school's website
- all leaders carefully analyse the information they have on pupils' and learners' progress in order to quickly identify and tackle underperformance
- all learners joining 'The Hub' from other providers have their needs quickly identified and appropriate provision rapidly implemented.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Herefordshire Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Peter Humphries  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During this one-day inspection we discussed the work of the school with you, your leadership team, other staff and your school improvement partner. We observed pupils' learning in classes across the school including at 'The Hub', your post-16 provision. During these observations, we looked at pupils' work and spoke to them about their learning. We also spoke informally to pupils about behaviour, attendance, how they learn how to keep themselves safe and about what it feels like to be a pupil at Barrs Court School. We observed pupils' behaviour as they arrived at the school, at breaks and lunchtime as well as in lessons. Discussions with five governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, helped to provide additional information. We looked at a range of school documents including the checks on staff members' suitability to work with children, the school's improvement plan, pupils' annual reviews and education, health and care plans, the minutes of governors' meetings and the school's information about pupils' progress, attainment, behaviour and attendance. We took account of the written responses to Ofsted's parent questionnaire and the 49 responses to the staff questionnaire.