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27 July 2016

Mr David Brandon-Bravo  
Headteacher  
Parkfields Middle School  
Park Road  
Toddington  
Dunstable  
Bedfordshire  
LU5 6AB

Dear Mr Brandon-Bravo

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of Parkfields Middle School**

Following my visit with Alison Dominey, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 13 July 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about published outcomes for pupils at the school.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation including: the records of checks made when staff are appointed (known as the single central record), records of pupils' achievement, written reports from a specialist leader of education, governors' minutes, the school's evaluation of its own performance and development plans. Inspectors met with you, other senior leaders, six subject leaders, a group of pupils, the chair of the governing body and three other governors. Telephone discussions were held with a representative of the local authority and also with the headteacher of the local upper school. Inspectors also held informal discussions with pupils at break and lunchtimes. The views of 23 parents who responded to Parent View, along with those expressed in two emails received, and those of a parent spoken with on the day of inspection, were taken into account. Inspectors visited 14 lessons, almost all accompanied by you or your deputy headteacher. A scrutiny of pupils' work in books and folders was also carried out.

## **Context**

Parkfields Middle School is a smaller than average middle-deemed-secondary school. The school educates pupils from Year 5 through to the end of Year 8. A significant number of parents of children for whom Parkfields Middle School is not their local school choose to send them to the school. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average. However, the proportion with education, health or care plans or a statement of special educational needs is above average. The school hosts a specialist unit to provide education for pupils with a hearing impairment. The headteacher is a national leader of education and the chair of governors is a national leader of governance. The school, working alongside the local authority, supports other schools in the local area. The school was judged to be outstanding in its most recent section 5 inspection in May 2012. A major building programme has just been completed on the school site.

## **Inspection findings**

Under your skilful and tireless leadership, the school continues to provide high-quality education for pupils of all abilities. You are well supported by your senior team and middle leaders in setting the highest expectations of how pupils should behave and what they are capable of achieving. Pupils respond exceptionally well to these expectations. As a consequence, behaviour is exemplary and outcomes for pupils over their four years at Parkfields Middle School are impressive.

Leadership at all levels is very well developed. The governing body provides clear strategic leadership and offers firm support and challenge to you and your staff. Governors are experienced, knowledgeable and frequent visitors to the school. They are highly effective in their role. Subject leaders, who share your ambition and enthusiasm, are very effective in their work. They frequently and accurately track progress that pupils make in each subject. These leaders use this information to improve the curriculum and provide additional support for pupils who fall behind. This results in very high proportions of pupils making significant and sustained progress across the curriculum.

It is of great importance to you that pupils get off to the best possible start to their education at Parkfields Middle School. Led by your transition manager, leaders ensure pupils have a very smooth transition into middle school. Pupils have time to settle and quickly develop an understanding of your high expectations. This is achieved through a range of well-chosen activities such as summer schools, sports and musical events and transition days (days when lower school pupils attend the middle school for lessons). Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are provided with appropriate additional support in terms of transition. This helps to prepare them well for middle school. As one parent commented, 'my child was very anxious and now is not anxious at all'.

You take great care to establish what pupils are capable of achieving when they join the school in Year 5. As well as taking into account information provided by pupils' previous schools, you have ensured that pupils have undertaken assessments that have been analysed in your school. You make use of the services of a specialist leader of education to assure yourself of the accuracy of teachers' assessments. As part of your drive to continually improve the school's practice, you have also begun to use additional externally marked assessments to establish pupils' capabilities. Your leaders use the accurate information gathered from these assessments to plan a broad curriculum that is precisely matched to the wide range of capabilities of pupils. Inspection evidence demonstrates that, as a consequence of this, and the high-quality teaching they receive, pupils make at least good and often better progress from their individual starting points across a wide range of subjects.

Your belief that there is no upper limit to what pupils can achieve is evident in many lessons across the school. The excellent quality of teaching, learning and assessment helps pupils of all abilities to make accelerated progress. Teachers make very effective use of the precise information about what pupils can do and plan learning that challenges and enthuses them. This was clearly evidenced in each of the lessons visited. For example, in a Year 7 English lesson, pupils demonstrated their thirst for learning and keen interest in finding out new information as they explored the murder of King Duncan in *Macbeth*. In a Year 5 science lesson, due to the teacher's skilful questioning, pupils quickly gained a clear understanding of the anatomy of the animals they had discovered in a pond dipping exercise.

Pupils thrive on the academic challenge that is presented to them. Pupils informed inspectors that they enjoy their learning. As one pupil explained, this is because 'teachers challenge us in a fun way'. Pupils in a Year 5 mathematics lesson demonstrated their deeper mathematical understanding as they worked on mental multiplication and division. In this lesson, the most able pupils were provided with opportunities to test their skills on increasingly difficult mathematical problems. Evidence from pupils' books demonstrates that this level of challenge is evident across a range of subjects over the school year.

Pupils informed inspectors that, because of their teachers' clear explanation, they know what they need to do to be successful in each piece of work and this motivates them to work harder. Teachers consistently provide pupils with feedback in line with your expectations. Pupils know what to do to improve their work and are afforded the opportunities to do so through their teachers' precise guidance. As a result, pupils make rapid and sustained progress.

Inspection evidence which included scrutiny of pupils' work in books, observation of learning in lessons and scrutiny of the school's precise assessment information demonstrates that pupils achieve very well. The progress that pupils make is at least good and often better. In 2016, provisional results indicate that standards achieved at the end of key stage 2 were higher than the national average. Over time, by the end of Year 8 (when pupils leave this school) pupils achieve standards above those expected for their age. This is especially the case in mathematics.

Progress in subjects other than English and mathematics is equally impressive.

You track the progress that disadvantaged pupils make with great care. You are aware that there was a dip in disadvantaged pupils' overall attainment and progress in 2015. You have analysed the reasons for this and have taken effective action to address this. Several of those who did not achieve as well as they could have in 2015 have already caught up with their peers. Disadvantaged pupils, including those who are among the most able, achieve well over their four years at Parkfields. This is because teachers know how to support and challenge them well. For example, the most able disadvantaged pupils were given the opportunity to demonstrate their language skills to write fluently in French about topics such as the work of Matisse. They did so very effectively. While the support that disadvantaged pupils receive has a significant impact on their progress, leaders do not track pupil premium funding with the precision to ensure that it could be even more effectively used.

Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well, socially and academically, from their individual starting points. This is due to the fact that they are very well cared for and their needs are quickly identified and precisely met. Teachers and teaching assistants are well trained and skilful in their support of these pupils. One parent commented that her child 'has not just been included in everything he wanted to take part in, but actively encouraged to try new things and given every support to do so'.

The most able pupils achieve well. This is because you identify their capability quickly and teachers have high expectations of what these pupils can achieve. They provide the most able with opportunities to extend their thinking and deepen their knowledge across a range of subjects. The most able pupils are also supported through other activities such as a mentoring scheme with pupils who are two years their senior.

Pupils behave exceptionally well. In lessons they are resilient, collaborative and work very hard. Pupils in a Year 7 mathematics lesson worked with good-humoured cooperation as they calculated compound interest. As a result, they were able to develop a deeper understanding of how mathematics can be applied to real-life situations. Pupils' behaviour at break and lunchtimes is similarly supportive and good humoured. For example, at lunchtime the school playground reverberated to the cheers of pupils who were encouraging their friends who were playing table tennis. Other pupils played happily or simply passed the time in the sunshine talking with friends. Pupils informed inspectors that the behaviour seen over the course of the inspection was typical of their everyday experience in school.

Pupils say they are safe at school. Parents agreed. Inspection evidence supports their views. School leaders make sure that pupils are taught the strategies they need to stay safe when online. Pupils know what bullying is and are clear that this is something that rarely happens at their school. School records confirm this to be the case. Pupils explained that if they had concerns they have every confidence that they would be resolved by the adults in school.

A distinctive feature of this school is how well leaders know each pupil, their achievement and attendance. As a result, leaders are able to act to improve the attendance of pupils who may be at risk of missing too much of their education. School leaders can point to several examples of where this has led to significant increases in attendance. As a consequence, attendance is above the national average. However, there is more work to be done to ensure that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, some of whom are disadvantaged pupils, attend as well as their peers.

### **External support**

You make use of, and offer support to, other schools. School leaders make effective use of external consultants to assure themselves of the accuracy of teachers' assessments. Through the work of a headteacher from another school, governors have been able to validate the judgements of senior leaders as to the effectiveness of the school. Subject leaders have developed a wider range of skills and knowledge through work with other schools.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Evaluate the impact of pupil premium funding on the outcomes that these pupils achieve with more precision.
- Review and appropriately amend strategies to improve the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for Central Bedfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Lucas  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**