

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mr Martin Casserley  
Headteacher  
Black Firs Primary School  
Longdown Road  
Congleton  
Cheshire  
CW12 4QJ

Dear Mr Casserley

### **Short inspection of Black Firs Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 19 April 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in November 2013.

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

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You and your leadership team know the school well. You use detailed information about the progress of your pupils to set challenging but realistic aims for the school. Your leadership team and governors have maintained a clear focus on improvement despite an unusually large staff turnover in 2016 which was beyond your control. The multi-academy trust have confidence in the school and provide challenge and support when required.

You and your team have taken effective action to tackle the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. As a result, the proportion of pupils achieving the higher standards in writing and mathematics in 2016 was similar to that seen nationally. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher standard in reading in key stage 2 in 2016 was also in line with national averages but was lower in key stage 1. However, the most able pupils currently in key stage 1 are working above the standard expected in reading. In mathematics, the most able pupils develop a greater understanding through reasoning and investigating numbers.

Your drive to provide the best education possible for pupils means that you constantly look for ways to improve. You acknowledge that more could be done to increase the progress of the most able pupils in writing so that an even greater proportion attain the higher standards. Lower- and middle-ability pupils make consistently more

progress from their starting points than the most able pupils. You recognise that the teaching and application of grammar, punctuation and spelling is inconsistent across key stage 2. Pupils write at length in history across school and in other areas of the curriculum in Year 5 and Year 6. However, pupils are given few opportunities to apply their writing skills in geography and science in other year groups. This lack of consistency hampers pupils' progress, particularly for the most able.

Your belief in life-long learning shines through. Pupils are taught skills which prepare them for future learning. They value the education they receive and one pupil told me that: 'You need a good education.' Staff have permission to be creative in their approach and they provide good role models for pupils through their own professional development and research. The breadth and creative delivery of the curriculum is a strength of the school. Pupils have a wide range of opportunities, including music, art, physical education and computing. Pupils are proud of their sporting success. However, you acknowledge that pupils' understanding of different faiths is not well developed. Your website does not contain sufficient information about the curriculum.

Pupils are polite and well-mannered. They behave well at all times. They say that behaviour is good, although there is some low-level disruption in classes and 'sometimes people fall out'. British values are promoted well and pupils demonstrate a good understanding of other cultures. However, pupils have limited knowledge or understanding of different religions.

Parents speak highly of the school. They value the communication they receive and the way that they are encouraged to be part of their child's learning. One said: 'Staff are nurturing, caring and inclusive and this filters down to the children.' A small minority of parents expressed concerns about the way that the school deals with bullying. This was not borne out by the inspection. Pupils said that bullying is rare and is dealt with by adults. Records of behaviour are clear and the few incidents of bullying are followed through.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Your governors ensure that all policies and procedures are in place, including checks on teachers and governors. Training for staff is comprehensive and up to date. The school utilises support from additional agencies to support vulnerable pupils as well as working with the local authority. You demonstrate a determination to ensure that pupils are kept safe and any unknown absences are followed up swiftly. Consequently, all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality.

### **Inspection findings**

- Pupils benefit from good teaching at all levels. New members of staff benefit from support and coaching from more experienced staff. Consequently, most pupils currently in the school, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress from their starting points.

- Pupils are attentive in lessons and behave well around school. Pupils demonstrate high levels of engagement in most classrooms. However, where lessons lack challenge, some pupils drift off task.
- In many classes, the most able pupils are given a high level of challenge. For example, in a Year 6 writing lesson, pupils were challenged to make a meaningful sentence out of a given set of words. They then discussed the parts of the sentence and had to make their own sentence, which followed the same structure. However, this level of challenge is not consistent across school. Progress for the most able pupils slows in some classes when learning is not moved on quickly enough.
- Additional adults are used effectively to enhance learning for individuals and groups. One pupil told me that adults 'help make our weaknesses stronger'.
- A key line of enquiry for this inspection was about how well leaders and governors ensure that the pupil premium grant is spent effectively to ensure good outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Published figures for disadvantaged pupils dipped in 2016. This was a small cohort of pupils, some of whom joined the school in the last year. Disadvantaged pupils currently in school are making progress that is similar to other pupils from their starting points.
- Governors have a good understanding of their statutory responsibilities in relation to pupil premium spending. They recognise that while the proportion of disadvantaged pupils is small, they need to ensure that all pupils make the progress that they are capable of. Governors appreciate the quality of information they receive from leaders about how much progress pupils make. They ask challenging questions to ensure that the additional funding benefits disadvantaged pupils.
- Another area I looked at was how effective leaders' actions are to improve the progress of boys in reading and writing at key stage 1 so that more reach the higher standard. In reading, boys in key stage 1 make good progress. This progress is similar to the good progress made by girls. Boys read fluently and with expression and can talk about characters and their actions. They are able to discuss the impact of these actions on the plot of a story. Boys say they enjoy reading and are encouraged to read at school and at home.
- In writing, boys make less progress than girls in key stage 1. However, this difference is diminishing and a greater proportion than previously are working at the expected standard. Boys in key stage 1 are confident writers and are eager to share their writing. The most able boys in Year 2 are beginning to write with maturity. For example, one pupil wrote: 'He had the gift of making giant roads out of webs.' However, there are currently too few boys working at the higher standard.
- Another line of enquiry was focused on how effectively governors carry out their statutory duties, particularly in relation to the information published on the school website. Governors continually strive for improvement and have taken steps to ensure that their own performance continues to improve.
- The information published on the school website did not meet requirements at the start of the inspection. Governors had not ensured that the information

published on the multi-academy trust website was also available on the school website. This was resolved during the inspection. However, the information about the curriculum does not meet requirements. This section refers to the school's approach to the curriculum but does not provide sufficient detail about what is taught in each subject in each year.

- I also looked at the effectiveness of leaders' actions to reduce the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who do not attend school regularly enough. Overall attendance is consistently slightly above that seen nationally. The unusually high proportion of disadvantaged pupils who were regularly absent in 2016 was as a result of the frequent absence of a very small number of pupils. Due to the relatively low numbers of disadvantaged pupils overall, this had a disproportionate effect on figures. The attendance of current disadvantaged pupils is much improved and is in line with that seen nationally.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the most able pupils make the progress necessary to reach the higher standards in writing by:
  - ensuring consistently high expectations in lessons
  - developing a clear approach to grammar, punctuation and spelling across school
  - ensuring that pupils in all year groups are given opportunities to practise and apply their writing skills across the curriculum, particularly in science and geography
- pupils develop a broad understanding of different religions to fully prepare them for life in modern Britain
- the information published on the website about the curriculum meets statutory requirements.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cheshire East. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tanya Hughes  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During this short inspection, I met with you, members of your leadership team, teachers and governors. I spoke with a representative of the multi-academy trust. You and I visited classes to observe learning and looked at work in pupils' books. I

met with pupils throughout the day and spoke with seven parents in the playground before school. I considered the 103 responses and the 98 free-text comments made by parents on the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. I also considered the 27 responses to the staff questionnaire. I heard several pupils read and observed pupils on the playground and in the dining hall.

I conducted a detailed review of safeguarding, including checking on the school's policies, procedures and record keeping. I talked with you, other staff and governors about how the school ensures that children are kept safe. I also considered a range of other documentation, including school improvement planning and information about pupils' progress and attainment.