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Mr Darren Reynolds
Headteacher
The Lacon Childe School
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Dear Mr Reynolds

Short inspection of The Lacon Childe School

Following my visit to the school on 7 November 2017 with Paul Elliott, 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 the school was judged to be good in October 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. There is a clear, shared ethos of high expectations underpinned by effective teaching and learning. Staff feel professional development encourages, challenges and supports them. As a result of stronger teaching, outcomes are improving in many subjects. Pupils enjoy their learning and the overwhelming majority of them feel stretched and challenged in their lessons. The local governing body is knowledgeable about the school. Governors are proud of its achievement and are ambitious for further improvement. They provide an effective balance of support and challenge. Governors carry out all statutory duties expected of them.

There have been significant changes since the last inspection in 2012. You became headteacher in 2013 and the school became part of the Shropshire Gateway Educational Trust in 2014. You are now chief executive of four schools, including three primaries. There is a great deal of shared practice, planning and training between the schools. Pupils' transition from primary school is effective. Teachers understand pupils' academic as well as pastoral needs. Also, pupils are more confident when they arrive in Year 7, having visited the school many times.

The aim is to be 'More than just a school' and you offer many opportunities outside the curriculum to meet this ambition. These include allowing pupils to develop leadership skills and a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities, which pupils

appreciate. Staff are proud to be members of this community. Teachers feel motivated and respected and say pupils' conduct is calm and orderly. Parents appreciate the school. They feel it offers a safe environment in which their children are happy and make good progress. One parent wrote, 'All teachers and senior staff treat pupils with respect and wish for all children to reach their full potential. They care very much for pupils' mental and physical health, as well as their education. Teaching staff are highly skilled, enthusiastic and dedicated... a wonderful school.'

Your evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is honest. This has led to improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. Your priority areas include ensuring that pupils make better progress in mathematics and targeting the extra money you receive to improve outcomes and attendance for disadvantaged pupils. You and governors agree that self-evaluation needs to become even more precise, particularly when assessing the impact of specific strategies used to address areas of relative weakness.

Since the last inspection, you have continued to improve teaching. New approaches include developing 'teacher researchers' and 'teaching and learning innovators'. Teachers investigate and share best practice within the school and externally. Teachers from primary schools have visited your school and made suggestions on ways to improve teaching. You have acted upon their recommendations and, as a result, your younger pupils make good progress.

Most pupils engage well in their learning. They have confidence in their teachers' strong subject knowledge and ability to support them if required. There is a relaxed and purposeful dialogue between teachers and pupils. The school environment, including classrooms, is impressive, informative and inspirational. Motivational messages sit alongside those celebrating and encouraging achievement. Pupils are appreciative of their learning environment and very respectful towards it. The school is litter and graffiti free.

You said your pupils would impress us and they did. Pupils are strong ambassadors for the school. They are polite, positive and speak highly of their teachers, friends and school. Every pupil spoken to by inspectors would recommend the school to others. Pupils play an active part in the life of the school. They can, for example, become members of the school council, prefects, sports ambassadors and librarians. Your 'health champions' develop pupils' understanding of physical and mental health. Pupils from this group helped choose the new catering provider and pupils are also involved in interviews for new staff.

The previous inspection report asked you to focus upon the quality of mathematics. Progress over time had been good but this was not maintained in 2017. You have rightly identified this as a focus area and are line managing the department yourself. Relatively new leadership in the department is beginning to have a positive impact on standards but leaders agree there is more to be done.

Internal assessment information shows that current disadvantaged pupils are making good progress. Inspection evidence confirms this, indicating that you are

building upon improvements seen in external examinations in 2017. Leaders accept there is even more to do in improving outcomes and attendance for disadvantaged pupils through better use of the extra funding received for these pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Regular, effective and targeted training keeps staff well informed. Those pupils who met inspectors formally and informally all reported that they felt safe. Pupils can explain how they are taught to keep safe, for example through learning about safe relationships in personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. Pupils are aware of how to report any concerns. Leaders responsible for children looked after carry out their duties effectively.

Teachers and parents agree that pupils are well cared for and safe in school. There is a strong safeguarding culture in your school.

Inspection findings

- In 2017, pupils made slow progress in mathematics, achieving, on average, half a grade less than their peers nationally. This contrasted sharply with English in which pupils made over half a grade more progress. Leaders are working with heads of successful departments to share good practice. Inspection evidence confirmed that leadership and teaching in mathematics are improving.
- While pupils' progress overall has been in line with national averages for the past two years, the progress of disadvantaged pupils has not matched this. Their progress, although improving, lags behind that of others nationally. There is a similar picture with attendance. Disadvantaged pupils are attending more regularly than previously but less well than other pupils in the school and nationally. There is a clear and shared focus upon further improving these areas, but leaders need to ensure even better use of the extra funding the school receives. Leaders realise the importance of this given an increasing number of disadvantaged pupils who joined the school over recent years.
- Areas leaders have identified for improvement match those of inspectors, following their analysis of school information. Evidence presented by leaders, and that seen during the inspection, confirmed improvements are taking place. Leaders are less assured at evaluating which interventions have greatest impact and need to know more about what is and is not working.
- Leaders meet pupils' needs through the curriculum, including encouraging them to learn modern foreign languages. More pupils now study languages at key stage 3. This will improve numbers of pupils studying the English baccalaureate at key stage 4.
- The curriculum provides a range of opportunities for pupils to learn about different faiths and cultures. Leaders have provided training so that teaching adapts to address the changing needs of pupils. For example, there are more disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities joining the school. Pupils enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular

activities and trips offered by the school. These include a wide range of sports, music, drama, dance, show jumping and gardening. Uptake for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award is particularly strong.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching in mathematics improves to match that in other subjects, especially in English
- they use pupil premium funding even more effectively so that disadvantaged pupils make faster progress and attend more often
- improvement targets have a sharper focus so that leaders know which actions are improving outcomes the most.

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

Yours sincerely

Nigel Griffiths
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met you, your leadership team, middle leaders and members of the local governing body. We met with pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, both formally and informally to discuss their views about the school. We carried out learning walks independently, with the leadership team and middle leaders to a variety of subjects and year groups. We looked at the school's documentation, including self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, assessment information on current pupils, together with recent levels of attendance and punctuality. We also checked the school's policies relating to safeguarding, behaviour, the curriculum and pupil premium. Inspectors considered 54 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 37 individual parent comments. We also considered 114 responses to the pupil questionnaire and 24 responses to the staff questionnaire.