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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Amy Rogers
Principal
Dashwood Banbury Academy
Merton Street
Banbury
Oxfordshire
OX16 4RX

Dear Mrs Rogers

Short inspection of Dashwood Banbury Academy

Following my visit to the school on 20 February 2018, 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 January 2014.

This school continues to be good.

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

You lead the school with energy, commitment and enthusiasm. You check all aspects of the school's work thoroughly, enabling you to have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and where further refinements are needed. Since your appointment in September 2017, you have wasted no time, ensuring that there is no loss of momentum to the school's planned improvements.

Staff know pupils and their families well and provide high levels of care. Relationships are warm and supportive. The school's values of 'self-worth, engagement and purpose' are reflected in pupils' positive attitudes, confidence and enjoyment of school. The majority of parents and carers have nothing but praise for leaders and the school. As one parent commented: 'I can't fault the school, it's great. The school has improved since the new principal took over.'

From below typical starting points, children in the early years achieve well. By the end of Reception, the proportion of children attaining the expected good level of development is close to the national average. Pupils' good progress and attainment are sustained through key stages 1 and 2. By the time they leave Dashwood, the proportion of Year 6 pupils who attain the expected standard is higher than average. Current pupils are making good progress and more of the most able pupils are attaining a greater depth of learning, especially in reading. However, very few disadvantaged pupils are working at a greater depth of learning.

In the majority of classes, pupils are well behaved. Nevertheless, you acknowledge that, in a minority of classes, where teaching does not fully engage and challenge all pupils, some of them lose focus and do not learn as well as they can. Pupils wear their uniform with pride and are pleased to help around the school by taking on responsibilities such as being a prefect. They enthuse about the many opportunities they have to take part in extra activities such as clubs and visits.

You and other leaders have taken effective action to address the areas for improvement identified during the last inspection. While teaching is not yet outstanding, it has continued to improve. You have made improvements to the quality and consistency of teachers' feedback to pupils, ensuring that pupils know how well they are learning. Middle leaders monitor and evaluate learning in their areas of responsibility well and set out planned improvements in their action plans. You have actively developed and 'grown' leaders, recognising the pivotal role that good leadership plays in driving school improvement. You quickly spot leadership potential and help staff to develop their skills through training.

In our visits to classrooms, we could see how the most able pupils were being challenged. In mathematics, older pupils were designing zoo enclosures with different areas and perimeters. In English, some pupils were asked to consider moral questions such as 'Is it ever right to tell a lie?'

In English, mathematics and science, teachers generally set work at the right level for pupils. However, in other subjects, we saw a more varied picture. We agreed that, until very recently, teachers have not routinely set difficult enough work for the most able pupils. As a result, we saw few examples of high-quality work which demonstrates a deep level of understanding. Since January, we could see that there have been some improvements, particularly in older pupils' history work on the topic of the Second World War. Some pupils' work showed maturity and depth in the quality of their responses to challenging themes, such as propaganda and racism. However, we agreed that these improvements are not yet fully embedded.

You have also strengthened other aspects of the school's work. You have improved assessment practice, including the accuracy of teachers' assessments. You have also reviewed and changed how mathematics is taught, aligning the curriculum content to the required standards in each key stage. You have taken action to improve pupils' speaking and writing. Across the school, pupils have many opportunities to learn by retelling familiar narratives and using these to structure and inspire their own writing.

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's work to keep pupils safe is exemplary. A strong safeguarding culture permeates the school and leaders, rightly, give safeguarding their highest priority. Record-keeping is systematic, detailed and thorough. Regular training on all aspects of safeguarding, including radicalisation, enables staff to be fully aware of their responsibilities and alert to any concerns.

School leaders have a comprehensive understanding of the potential risks to pupils. They work closely with other agencies and leaders in local schools to understand and respond collectively to any community issues. Leaders work hand in hand with external agencies to make sure that referrals and concerns are swiftly followed through and that pupils are kept safe. The school's inclusion and welfare officer provides good-quality support for families. Her good partnership with parents and knowledge of families enable her to provide timely, early help and support for pupils.

Pupils are knowledgeable about how to keep safe, including when online. For example, they know that they should never share passwords with other people or communicate with anyone whose identity they do not know. Older pupils also benefit from attending the junior citizen programme to strengthen their knowledge of personal safety. Pupils said that they feel safe at school and value the care of staff at the school. As one pupil commented, 'If you are worried about something, you can always turn to a teacher.' The vast majority of parents agree that their children feel safe at school and staff are unanimous that pupils are safe at Dashwood.

Inspection findings

- At the start of this inspection, we agreed to focus on some aspects of the school's work. These included pupils' behaviour, the progress of the most able pupils, including boys and those who are disadvantaged, how well leaders use the additional funds to improve disadvantaged pupils' attainment and attendance and how effectively leaders and governors are enabling the school to continue to improve.
- In the majority of classes and around the school, pupils behave well and are polite and helpful. Staff set clear expectations and appropriately manage pupils' behaviour. Across the school, relationships are strong and most classrooms are purposeful environments for learning. However, leaders acknowledge that, in a minority of classes, where teachers set tasks that do not sufficiently engage or challenge pupils, some pupils lose focus. When this happens, some pupils do not learn as well as they could, and these classes have a less-settled working atmosphere.
- Teachers apply the school's policy for dealing with unacceptable behaviour consistently and pupils said that they are fair. Pupils also said that other pupils are kind and mostly well behaved and that bullying rarely happens. Pupils are confident that any bullying or upsets are dealt with promptly by teachers. The school has individual plans for the few pupils who have emotional or behavioural challenges and these pupils are given the support they need to help them manage their behaviour. Over time, the number of incidents of inappropriate behaviour has decreased. Exclusion is only used as a very last resort and leaders are proportionate and measured in their approach.
- The majority of the most able pupils, including boys and those who are disadvantaged, are making good progress in English, mathematics and science. More pupils are now working at greater depth of learning, particularly in reading.

The most able boys are achieving as well as girls and, in some year groups, are outperforming girls. The most able disadvantaged pupils are making similar progress to other pupils, although few are currently working at a greater depth of learning. Pupils' work in other subjects paints a more varied picture. In the wider curriculum, while there have been some recent improvements, many tasks offer insufficient challenge for the most able pupils. As a result, the most able pupils do not achieve as well as they can. School leaders have recognised and are addressing this issue. However, it is too soon to see the full impact of this work.

- Leaders use the additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils well and carefully evaluate which programmes make the greatest difference to pupils' learning. They have implemented a raft of different strategies, including extra support in class, smaller class sizes and bespoke 'catch-up' programmes. Leaders have allocated funds so that disadvantaged pupils can take part in visits and other out-of-school activities. The breakfast club has helped to improve attendance and punctuality. The inclusion and welfare officer and other leaders take a vigorous approach to pursuing any attendance concerns. As a result, disadvantaged pupils' attendance has improved and fewer pupils are persistently absent. Disadvantaged pupils are also making similar progress to other pupils, although very few are currently working at a greater depth of learning.
- Since the previous inspection, there has been a substantial increase in the number of pupils on roll. As a result, many new staff have joined the school. Leaders and governors have managed this growth well. The principal is ably supported by the executive principal and other leaders. They work together as a strong team and have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and where further improvements are needed. Leaders have high aspirations for pupils and a demonstrable commitment to improvement.
- Governors visit the school regularly to check on key aspects of the school's work, such as safeguarding and pupils' learning. There are clear lines of accountability at both governing board level and through the academy trust. Trustees provide appropriate support and challenge. They contribute to the school's regular programme of monitoring, ensuring that standards and progress are kept continuously 'under the spotlight'. Subject leadership has strengthened and these leaders now play a more strategic role in driving improvement. As a result of effective leadership, the school is continuing to improve.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue their good work to raise the level of challenge in the wider curriculum, particularly for the most able pupils
- in all classes, teachers set tasks that engage and challenge pupils so that they learn as well as they can
- disadvantaged pupils make faster progress so that more of them, especially the most able, achieve a greater depth of learning.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local advisory board (governing body),

the director of the board of trustees, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Oxfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Cox
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Together with you, I visited each classroom. I looked at how well pupils are learning and behaving and talked to them about their work. I met with you and the executive principal to discuss the school's self-evaluation. In addition, I met with other leaders to discuss pupils' progress and the support for disadvantaged pupils. I held a meeting with three governors, including the chair of governors. I reviewed a wide range of documents, including the school's pre-employment checks on the suitability of staff to work with children, safeguarding information and school policies and documents. I met with a group of pupils from Years 2 to 6 and observed pupils at play during lunchtime. I considered the 23 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and spoke to some parents at the start of the school day. I also took into account the 37 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the six responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.