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Mrs Kim Fox
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Fox

Short inspection of John Buchan Middle School

Following my visit to the school on 30 January 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 February 2015.

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 an understated, yet firm, authority. Since taking up your position as headteacher, your effective actions have developed the quality of leadership across the school. As a result, leaders at all levels are now contributing more fully to school improvement. This is particularly the case with subject leaders, who are playing a key role in improving the quality of education in their areas of responsibility. It is also clear to see that staff across the school are working together effectively as a team. The impact of your work is improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and is leading to better outcomes for pupils.

Your school is a happy and caring place. Pupils show pride in their work and are happy to talk to adults about their learning. Pupils are challenged to think 'as historians' when discussing their views openly with their peers. Activities that prompt pupils' deeper explanations and reasoning, for example when trying to identify which figure was King Harold in the Bayeux Tapestry, develop pupils' use of historical sources well. However, it is clear that some boys do not feel as confident or engaged in learning as girls. In some classes, boys' attitudes to learning are holding back their progress.

Most teachers use questioning effectively to deepen pupils' understanding and challenge perceptions. For example, suggestions that the world might be flat prompt good-quality debate and challenge assumptions during geography. Discussions about this concept and how it would affect the sun's warming of the earth's surface, and the impact this might have on the wind, intrigue pupils to seek

out further information. Pupils report that teachers are enthusiastic and make learning fun, 'mostly'. Typical comments are: 'teachers are good at working towards the answers with you' and 'Some teachers are better at that than others though!'

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors highlighted the many strengths of the school. They reported that pupils were eager to learn, their attendance was good, and that attainment by the time they left Year 8 was better than expected for their age. Inspectors also identified the need for the mathematics curriculum to be strengthened and for pupils' spelling, punctuation and presentational skills to be improved. Leaders have addressed these matters successfully. The mathematics curriculum is effective. It covers all aspects required by the national curriculum and supports the majority of pupils to make good or better progress. Where this is not the case, robust interventions are put in place to ensure that pupils catch up. Work in pupils' books is generally well presented. Pupils take a pride in their work. They spell and punctuate their work increasingly well as they move through the school, contributing to good outcomes in English.

Since the last inspection, leaders have continued the important process of self-evaluation. You understand very clearly the school's many strengths, as well as the priorities for improvement. These include your focus on further improving outcomes in mathematics. You have also identified that more could be done to improve the progress made by lower-attaining pupils, many of whom are boys.

Safeguarding is effective.

Arrangements to safeguard pupils are effective. Policies, procedures and systems are robust. Day-to-day routines are well thought through and designed effectively to keep pupils safe. Importantly, the culture to safeguard pupils is strong. Staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities to protect children. Their training is up to date. They know what to do if they have concerns.

Members of the school governance committee (SGC) are keenly aware of their responsibility to safeguard children. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) carries out timely audits of safeguarding practice, which help leaders verify the effectiveness of safeguarding policies and procedures. Pupils are positive about the levels of care and support available in school, as are the large majority of parents. Parents are particularly positive about the care and pastoral support for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.

Inspection findings

- Teachers have good subject knowledge, which they put to use in planning learning that excites and engages pupils. As a result, most pupils show good attitudes to learning and enjoy coming to school.
- The majority of pupils make good or better progress in mathematics as they move through the school. Classroom visits, including the scrutiny of pupils' work, supported by the school's own progress data, show this to be the case.
- Outcomes in mathematics at the end of Year 6 in 2017 were below average.

Leaders' appropriate actions are addressing this underachievement. An effective action plan is proving successful. Training is improving the quality of teaching in mathematics. Targeted interventions to improve the performance of pupils who performed poorly were put in place as a matter of urgency and are now having a positive impact. Pupils who underachieved in Year 6 are now making more rapid progress to catch up in Year 7. Leaders are aware that there is still more work to do to address this issue fully.

- In some year groups, boys do not make as much progress as girls in reading and writing. This is particularly the case with boys who join the school with low prior attainment, or boys who arrive at the school who have not made the progress they should have since leaving Year 2. Because leaders track the progress of pupils well, they know that this is a problem, and not just for boys. Staff are fully aware of the pupils who need to catch up, particularly in key stage 2. Leaders have made improving provision for low-attaining pupils a key priority. They need to be mindful that boys' attitudes to learning should be considered as part of this work.
- The school's curriculum is fit for purpose. It reflects the community the school serves, while ensuring that pupils look outwardly on the world in which they live. Pupils' emotional well-being is given a high priority. They know about keeping safe when using the internet or social media. Pupils also learn about tolerance and respect for the views of others. They told the inspector with one strong voice that racism and prejudice of any kind are not acceptable. The extra-curricular aspect is also strong. Pupils enjoy trips into the local area, learning about the traditions and customs of their host country. Weekly clubs and annual events such as the Christmas production or 'bake-off' competition enrich the curriculum offer further.

Next steps for the school

School leaders and members of the school governance committee should ensure that:

- pupils make more progress in mathematics, especially by the end of key stage 2, so that outcomes in mathematics improve to match those in English
- lower-attaining pupils, especially boys, make more rapid progress so that their outcomes improve to match those of their peers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the SGC and the senior principal, MOD schools. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Clive Close

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, you accompanied me as I visited classrooms, assessing the progress pupils were making and talking to them about their learning. I observed pupils' behaviour throughout the day. I held meetings with senior leaders, the chair and one other member of the SGC, two representatives of MOD schools, and a representative group of pupils. I talked to parents at the start of the school day and took into account 59 replies to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire and accompanying text messages. I also received a letter submitted by a parent. I took into account the 31 replies to the staff survey and 18 replies to the pupil survey. A wide range of documentation was scrutinised, including pupils' progress information, the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, policies, minutes of meetings of the SGC, and records of visits by the MOD's inspector adviser.