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Miss Loretta Barratt
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Dear Miss Barratt

Short inspection of Dorrington Academy

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 2018 with Kevin Butlin, 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 March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school is improving towards being outstanding. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

You have created a culture in the school where all staff put pupils at the centre of everything they do. Your passion and determination to ensure that the needs of every individual pupil are met are to be admired. The whole school community shares your vision of striving to achieve the very best for all pupils and staff frequently go 'above and beyond' to ensure that this is achieved. Teamwork across the school is exceptional and all staff believe in the school's motto of 'Together we are stronger.'

You and your staff inspire pupils to achieve their very best. Pupils appreciate this and say, 'Teachers don't shout, they let you talk.' Pupils thrive in your school as a result of teaching that is consistently of a very high quality. Teachers provide pupils with rich and engaging learning experiences that are precisely matched to their individual learning needs. This motivates pupils to try hard, challenge themselves and never give up. Pupils demonstrate a true desire to learn. This enables pupils to make very strong progress in all subjects. Pupils' behaviour is impeccable. They welcome visitors to their classes and are eager to share their learning. They are,

rightly, very proud of their school.

At the last inspection, you were asked to develop teachers' questioning skills and the guidance they give to pupils, provide pupils with more opportunities to write at length, and develop the skills of your senior leaders. You have tackled all of these areas exceptionally well through a carefully structured improvement programme. This has led to considerable improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and in the skills of your leadership team.

You keep governors very well informed about how well the school is progressing, including about the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' outcomes. All governors have an excellent understanding of this information and what the school needs to do to improve further. Since the last inspection their regular visits to the school have focused carefully on the key development areas. They provide you and your leaders with a high level of challenge, but also support you and your leaders in driving further school improvements. Governors contribute to the remarkably strong leadership team in your school, which has enabled the school to go from strength to strength.

There is a clear sense of inclusivity across the school that is shared by all staff. Extensive and effective work is carried out to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils. Your leaders ensure that the pupil premium funding is used to the greatest effect to help disadvantaged pupils make strong progress academically. In addition to this, your leaders consider carefully the social and emotional needs of these pupils and use some of the funding to raise their self-esteem and confidence. For example, initiatives such as the 'extended day' provide additional support in reading and mathematics, while sporting opportunities develop pupils' confidence in physical activities. Support is tailored to individual pupils' needs. However, the strategic overview of the impact of the myriad of initiatives to support disadvantaged pupils is in its early stages.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders not only ensure that staff receive regular safeguarding training, but also check that they understand it. The strong culture of safeguarding across the school means that all staff are confident to share any concerns, however small they think they are, with leaders. Where concerns are raised, leaders take swift action to provide the support and care needed to keep pupils safe, including working with outside agencies when further support and guidance are needed. All staff go to great lengths to keep pupils as safe as possible.

Pupils say they feel safe and secure in school. They know that there is always someone they can talk to if they have a concern. Pupils have many opportunities to learn how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations. For example, in the 'getting to know you week' at the start of the year, pupils learn about e-safety and how to keep themselves safe when using the internet.

Inspection findings

- You and your leaders have successfully introduced a range of initiatives to help current pupils make exceptionally strong progress in reading and phonics. The culture of reading is now deeply embedded across the school. The school's 'text led curriculum' inspires a love of reading in pupils. You further enthuse pupils to read by providing a wide range of high-quality reading materials that meet their needs and interests. You encourage pupils to be involved with the choice of books purchased for the school. Pupils' enjoyment of reading is also promoted through the 'reading in yoga' sessions. These yoga sessions are planned around a text and further support pupils' language development and joy of storytelling.
- Pupils know the importance of reading and are committed to reading every day, both in school and at home. They talk enthusiastically about reading and teachers make sure they understand precisely what they need to improve even further. Pupils confidently read aloud to their peers, and also listen intently when their friends read to them. Teachers go to great lengths to encourage and support parents to understand how they can help their children's reading at home.
- The teaching of reading and phonics is of a very high quality across the school. Reading lessons focus on specific reading skills that are carefully planned to meet pupils' individual learning needs. The 'gist list' (who, why, where, what and when) helps pupils to quickly establish the meaning of what they are reading. Leaders have developed a bespoke approach to the teaching of phonics that enables pupils to rapidly develop the skills they need to become fluent readers.
- For each year group, leaders carefully match texts that link to other areas of the curriculum. For example, Year 6 pupils focus on reading books such as 'Carrie's war' and 'The boy in the striped pyjamas', which link with their topic of the Second World War. This provides pupils with many opportunities to read in subjects other than English.
- Leaders track all pupils' progress very closely. Any pupil not making the progress they should receive additional support immediately to help them catch up. As well as providing highly effective support for pupils who are not achieving the levels expected for their age, teachers also ensure that the most able pupils receive additional challenge to enable them to achieve as highly as possible. As a result of this superb quality of teaching and support, current pupils make at least good, and in many cases exceptional, progress in reading and phonics.
- Your focus on developing the quality of your leadership team has been highly successful. Leadership at all levels is very well developed. Every member of staff understands their role and responsibilities and their contribution to the whole-school improvement drive. There is a true shared accountability for ensuring that all pupils achieve as highly as possible. Senior leaders work alongside team leaders in each year group, closely monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress.
- Where teachers require any support, training or guidance, leaders provide it almost immediately. You make sure that the best practice is shared across the school. Senior leaders provide bespoke weekly training sessions for teaching assistants and teachers new to the profession. Staff value greatly the support

they receive, saying, 'Success is celebrated and support is provided in a trusted environment.' This highly structured teamwork and exceptionally strong leadership have led to rapid improvements in the quality of teaching and learning across the school.

- Leaders have developed highly effective strategies to support pupils with challenging behaviours. A learning mentor works with pupils and families to develop individual plans to help pupils improve their behaviour. In addition to this, leaders seek further guidance from outside agencies when needed. You and your senior leaders are committed to supporting teachers to manage behaviour and are highly visible throughout the school day. Consequently, exclusions have reduced significantly since last year.
- You have very high expectations of yourself and your staff. However, this is not to the detriment of anyone's well-being. You ensure that your staff feel valued, trusted and supported. For example, 'free reign Friday' enables teachers to have quality time with pupils on a one-to-one basis to address any gaps in their learning. This further supports the excellent progress pupils make. You also provide yoga sessions for staff that help to support their physical and mental health. You provide inspirational leadership to your staff, who, in turn, provide pupils with learning experiences of a very high quality.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the strategic overview of the impact of the pupil premium spending is further developed.

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

Yours sincerely

Ann Pritchard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, members of the governing body and members of your leadership team. They talked to pupils about their learning, heard some pupils read and looked at examples of their work. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour before school and at lunchtime. They spoke to parents and to pupils informally throughout the day. An inspector also met formally with a group of pupils. They reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's own evaluation of its performance, the school development plan, documents relating to keeping pupils safe, and the most recent information about pupils' achievement and their behaviour and

attendance. Inspectors considered the 30 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire and the 49 responses to the staff questionnaire. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire.