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Mr Mark Wilson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Wilson

Short inspection of Lode Heath School

Following my visit to the school on 26 June 2018 with Bianka Zemke HMI and Derek Barnes 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.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

At the previous inspection, you were charged with accelerating pupils' progress, better supporting pupils who have behavioural needs and improving leaders' checks on progress. These areas have not been effectively addressed.

Following the previous inspection, several years of high staff turnover and difficulties in recruiting teachers in some subjects led to a decline in behaviour, attendance and the quality of teaching. Consequently, pupils' outcomes declined, and their progress by the end of Year 11 was weak in both 2016 and 2017. You have successfully stemmed this decline, and some improvement is now evident in each of these areas. For example, published GCSE outcomes were a little better in 2017 than in 2016 in some subjects including English.

Your decision to join the Arden Multi-Academy Trust (AMAT) in January 2018 has contributed considerably to the current improvements being made across the school. AMAT has been particularly effective in helping Lode Heath to recruit teachers in shortage subjects, including mathematics. It has also provided highly effective support in improving teaching and provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Since the school joined AMAT, governors have begun to provide a greater degree of challenge to leaders.

You recognise that the next few months pose a particular challenge for the school, as a new headteacher takes up post in September 2018 and there are several other changes at senior leadership level. AMAT is set to provide support for the leaders who will be new to post.

You and your leadership team demonstrate great integrity and honesty. Pupils, staff, parents and carers appreciate your leadership. All staff who responded to their inspection questionnaire said that the school is well led, as did most parents who responded to Parent View. You are well aware of those areas that need to improve in the school, including pupils' progress and attendance and support for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Pastoral care remains a strength of the school. Staff know pupils well and pupils trust their teachers. Relationships are respectful throughout the school. You have a team of committed teachers and other adults who care deeply about, and are proud to belong to, the school.

Pupils generally have positive attitudes to learning. Most behave well and are keen to be successful. They are polite, courteous and show respect to each other, to adults and for the school's buildings and facilities. However, they should be achieving better academic outcomes than they have been in recent years.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that staff are well aware of their primary responsibility to keep pupils safe. They have been well trained and you tailor that training well to local and new priorities, such as child sexual exploitation or the effects of stress and anxiety on young people. Consequently, staff are confident to refer on to appropriate persons any concerns they have about pupils. Leaders deal with referrals appropriately, drawing on external agencies when the need arises.

Safeguarding systems and procedures are fit for purpose. Records relating to child protection are detailed, well organised and stored securely.

Pupils feel safe in school. All pupils who spoke with inspectors confirmed this fact, as did almost all who completed their inspection questionnaire. They told inspectors that bullying is rare in school. They expressed confidence in the school's adults to deal with any bullying or other problems that they might experience. All staff who responded to their inspection questionnaire said that pupils are safe in school, as did almost all parents who completed Parent View.

Inspection findings

- The inspection's first focus area was mathematics. GCSE outcomes were very weak in this subject in both 2016 and 2017. Several mathematics teachers had left the school in previous years and leaders had struggled to recruit permanent, high-quality staff to replace them.

A succession of temporary and/or non-specialist teachers taught many pupils,

and this had a detrimental effect on their progress. Mathematics teaching has improved this year. With the help of AMAT, the school has successfully recruited permanent, specialist teachers. The department is currently almost fully staffed and it is poised to be fully staffed, with additional capacity, from September 2018. Subject-specialist teachers now plan lessons that are generally well matched to pupils' abilities, with planned support for those who struggle and extra challenge for those who complete tasks quickly. Most pupils have positive attitudes to the subject and enjoy their mathematics lessons. Leaders anticipate much better GCSE outcomes this year, although they cannot be completely confident because of teachers' previously overgenerous assessments of pupils' attainment.

- The second area that inspectors considered was the provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. The very few pupils who have education, health and care (EHC) plans benefit from effective support from teaching assistants in class and make reasonable progress as a result. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, but who do not have an ECH plan have made very poor progress in recent years. Until recently, leaders have incorrectly identified some pupils as having SEN because of poor behaviour rather than a specific additional need. Teachers have been unaware of which pupils have SEN and/or disabilities and have therefore not planned activities that support these pupils' needs. However, provision has improved this year following the intervention of senior leaders, well supported by AMAT. Leaders now accurately identify those pupils who have SEN. Teachers now know who these pupils are, their particular needs and how they should adapt their teaching to support them. Many teachers use this information well when planning lessons, but some do not because they lack the expertise to put leaders' advice into practice.
- Leaders have improved the school's systems for checking on pupils' progress. They are now able to identify pupils, or groups of pupils, who are falling behind. They are beginning to take action to help these pupils catch up. As a consequence of the improvements this year, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, but who do not have an ECH plan, are now making better progress, although it still lags some way behind that of other pupils.
- The inspection's next focus area was the quality of the school's curriculum and its impact on outcomes at the end of Year 11. At key stage 3, the curriculum contains an appropriate range of subjects with sufficient time allocated to most. Leaders have allocated a few subjects, including design technology, music and art much less time than other subjects. In some of these subjects, achievement at the end of Year 11 is not strong, but inspectors found no convincing evidence that this was due to a lack of teaching time during key stage 3. Leaders have identified some weaknesses in the curriculum at key stage 4, where there has been a limited choice of subjects. Consequently, some pupils have studied subjects that they would not otherwise have chosen and have not achieved well as a result. Leaders have sought to remedy this situation by offering a wider range of options, better suited to pupils' interests and aspirations, in Year 10 from September 2018.
- Further inspection focus areas were the behaviour and attendance of pupils. Behaviour, which had declined since the previous inspection, has now improved

following leaders' review of policy and procedures in September 2016. The impact of these changes was evident in the 2016/17 academic year when the number of fixed-term exclusions fell sharply compared to previous years. The number of permanent exclusions also fell considerably during this time. Pupils told inspectors that behaviour has improved markedly, and the great majority of staff who completed their inspection questionnaire said that they believe behaviour to be good in the school. During the inspection, pupils behaved well in lessons, at breaktime, lunchtime and as they moved around the school. They were polite and respectful and demonstrated positive attitudes to learning.

- Attendance has been below the national average for secondary schools in recent years and it remains so this year. There was some improvement in 2017 compared with the previous year, and this year is currently showing a very small further improvement. However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils remains low and has fallen this year. This is a cause for concern. Leaders do not routinely analyse and evaluate information about attendance or behaviour of groups of pupils. Consequently, they are not aware of patterns or trends beyond simple headline figures. They therefore do not target interventions well to pupils and groups of pupils who attend poorly or who continue to misbehave. The historic incorrect identification of pupils' SEN means that leaders cannot have an accurate view about the attendance or behaviour of pupils who genuinely have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Governors are committed to the school and show a genuine desire to see it improve. However, the governing body currently lacks expertise in secondary education. Although they are aware of the school's key weaknesses, they have an overgenerous view of the school's effectiveness and are not able to hold leaders to account effectively for the school's performance. Recent support from AMAT is beginning to see the governing body scrutinising the school's performance more effectively.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching continues to improve so that pupils' progress accelerates in all subjects, especially in those where progress is weak, including mathematics
- leaders provide support to teachers whose skills and practice are not good enough to take pupils' SEN into account when planning lessons and activities
- attendance improves, especially that of disadvantaged pupils
- leaders routinely analyse and evaluate information about attendance and behaviour to spot patterns and trends and then use this information to plan future interventions
- senior leaders who are new in post are well supported and are quickly effective in their roles
- governors have sufficient knowledge and expertise to hold leaders to account for the school's performance.

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

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, members of your senior leadership team, a middle leader and two representatives from AMAT, including its executive principal. We visited several classes with senior leaders, during which we observed teaching and learning and spoke with pupils about their work. We talked with many pupils in lessons and at breaktime and lunchtime. I met with two governors. We scrutinised several documents including your self-evaluation, the school development plan, minutes of governing body meetings, an AMAT review of the school and safeguarding and child protection records. Parents' views were considered through the 55 responses to Parent View, including the 33 free text comments. We also considered the 46 responses from members of staff and 39 responses from pupils to their respective online inspection questionnaires.