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Dear Mrs Button

Short inspection of Blackminster Middle School

Following my visit to the school on 9 October 2018, with Dan Robinson, 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 November 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Pupils in all year groups are making good progress in English, mathematics and in a wide range of subjects across the curriculum. Pupils are very well behaved, courteous, patient and hardworking and they attend school regularly. The governing body supports you effectively. You and the staff have a good relationship with the local authority.

You have a resilient leadership style. This has been particularly important when you helped the school cope with the significant challenges presented by the reorganisation of schools in the local area. For example, together with the governing body, you have successfully secured a major rebuilding programme for the school which offers pupils exciting new facilities. The result is that you have a school community in which pupils and staff are optimistic and positive about learning.

You and your leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Your self-evaluation is precise and thorough. This means that, for example, the school development plan is well linked to clear targets. You have built a system for getting and sharing pupils' progress information that is reliable and manageable. You hold regular meetings between senior and middle leaders called 'Holding Ourselves To Account'. These are opportunities for leaders to discuss the effectiveness of their plans. For example, you are able to measure the impact of your work to improve reading. The training you have given staff on how to help pupils' inference skills has paid off. Pupils' progress in reading is strong in all years. In pupils' workbooks, inspectors saw clear

evidence of pupils using reading materials in a thoughtful manner.

In English, pupils use evidence from fiction and non-fiction to write about the effects writers create. We saw typical examples of pupils closely reading a range of challenging texts, including biographical writing, work by Shakespeare and carols in Polish. We heard pupils read aloud with enthusiasm and good expression. In history, there are impressive examples of pupils using historical sources to write expansively and in a scholarly manner about the Tudor times and the Reformation.

This year, you have appointed a new head of English and a new head of mathematics. Inspectors could see the positive impact these leaders are having. For example, resources are well used in mathematics to engage pupils' interest and in English good planning means there is a consistent approach to challenging most-able pupils. You have put in place a new and effective assessment system. The impact of this is that teachers successfully identify the specific skills and knowledge pupils need to make good progress. You have made good links with other schools to standardise and moderate test results so that judgements made about attainment and progress are fair and accurate. Consequently, pupils get good-quality feedback and governors receive credible information about pupils' outcomes. You take pride in the curriculum and you provide interesting learning for pupils. For example, occasionally pupils learn mathematics through orienteering; they use drama in English to bring books to life and enjoy their practical experiments in science. Pupils spoke highly of these lessons.

You have made effective progress on the issues raised in the previous inspection. You now have more regular lesson observations; you help staff share their planning so they learn from strong practice. As a result, pupils think for themselves and develop research and problem-solving skills, in mathematics, history and English. Teachers are more effective at matching learning activities to pupils' needs and this has led to most-able pupils now making better progress across the school. You know there is more to do to ensure greater consistency of strong mathematics teaching.

The governing body is a strength of the school. Governors have a wealth of relevant experience and are skilled at helping you support the pupils. The way they have worked together to ensure the school has a viable future and to secure considerable investment from the local authority in new classrooms is welcomed by staff, pupils and parents. Governors visit the school regularly to see the impact of leaders' actions. They help you with your scrutiny of pupils' work, and this enables them to understand how you evaluate the impact of your work and how well pupils are learning. They have a clear idea of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. For example, they know that mathematics has improved in the last few years and know pupils' progress is good.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders ensure that there is a strong culture of safeguarding in school. Staff are well trained how to identify when pupils are at risk and how to take swift and effective action if needs be. Staff report to leaders any concerns they have about pupils' welfare and these issues are dealt with by you and your colleagues sensitively and promptly. Leaders work well with the local authority, for example, in reducing the proportion of pupils who

do not attend school frequently. Pupils learn well about keeping themselves and others safe. Pupils say there is no bullying at the school and they feel confident that if there were, staff would deal with it quickly.

Staff take great care to ensure that pupils are safe throughout the school day and when pupils attend after-school events, trips and visits. Leaders have been appropriately trained to recruit staff in a safe manner and they make sure all of the necessary pre-employment checks are completed thoroughly and all vetting checks comply with government guidance.

Inspection findings

- We agreed to focus on a number of areas to check if the school is still good. We scrutinised how well leaders are ensuring that disadvantaged pupils and most-able pupils are making at least good progress. Inspectors found that throughout the school and across the curriculum, these pupils are enjoying their learning and are making good progress.
- You build pupils' curriculum around mathematics and English and you ensure that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. This has been more successful in English than in mathematics in recent times. This year, disadvantaged and most-able pupils are making good progress in mathematics. Staffing in mathematics has become more stable and this means the amount of consistently good teaching is improving. You have trained staff well to offer pupils interesting lessons in a broad curriculum. For example, pupils take part in imaginative music lessons in djembe drums and learn about complex rhythm patterns. Staff take pupils to Worcester College to give them careers information. This results in pupils' growing motivation and aspiration. In technology, pupils learn successfully how to use textiles, for example, making a decorative quilt to commemorate the centenary of the end of the First World War.
- You have used your premium grant well to provide support for disadvantaged pupils when they need it. For example, inspectors saw a highly effective one-to-one session that was typical of this careful guidance. It was well planned using detailed information about what pupils are capable of and to identify gaps in their learning so that they can be addressed quickly. As a result, pupils grow in competence and confidence, especially in literacy. We saw disadvantaged pupils writing accurately in diary form, analysing poetry and writing about issues raised by the Holocaust.
- Higher-ability pupils throughout the school are making good progress. They are challenged well. Pupils have a good understanding of demanding skills, such as the conjugation of a wide range of verb forms in Year 6 French and the ability to write accurately in extended forms in English using adventurous grammatical choices. Pupils talk enthusiastically about what they had learned in science; for example, the curiosity they have developed in molecular structure. Some writing in history was exceptionally strong; for instance, when pupils had researched and written about the relationship between church and state at the time of the Reformation.
- Another focus for the inspection was how well pupils are performing in mathematics. You have given significant and effective support to staff, particularly in ways to help pupils' mathematics reasoning. This has contributed to sustained improvement in

pupils' progress over the last two years in both key stages. We saw examples of teachers using questioning that helped pupils make connections between mathematical concepts. Pupils used number and shape puzzles to challenge and develop their reasoning. In a Year 7 lesson, pupils were asked to test the statement that 'multiples of nine will always have the sum of nine.' The effect of this was that pupils were focused on how mathematics reasoning works.

- There is some highly effective teaching in mathematics, resulting in enthusiasm for learning and good progress in fluency and problem-solving. In a lesson on factorising, pupils had made three-dimensional models to help them remember key ideas. Pupils were eager to show their models and describe how these had helped their understanding. These pupils wanted the lesson to go on past the bell and were eager to keep talking about their learning. They were confident enough to ask questions when they were stuck and listened patiently as the teacher gave her helpful and imaginative explanations.
- A few pupils in some mathematics lessons do not make enough progress because their understanding of how to add and subtract fractions and how to multiply negative numbers is too fragile. Typically, these pupils do not always check that they know how to improve their work. Leaders are addressing this by improving the assessment process to help pupils see which skills they need to improve. Leaders are also helping teachers learn from best practice within the school and in other schools.
- We examined how well you and the staff have improved pupils' attendance. You and your staff ensure that pupils behave well and, as a result, the overwhelming majority enjoy coming to school and have positive attitudes to learning. Staff have maintained a welcoming and secure culture throughout the school. Staff have developed a wide range of rewards, available to recognise those pupils who achieve good and improving attendance. In the past, some disadvantaged pupils have not been attending often enough. We found there have been marked improvements in the attendance of these pupils. This said, there are a small minority of pupils whose attendance is still not regular enough.
- Staff take every opportunity in lessons and tutor time to encourage high levels of attendance. The member of staff who leads this is very effective and analyses thoroughly each pupil's individual circumstances and plans successful interventions. Successful strategies include visiting families to discuss how the school can help and making much more frequent phone calls and sending text messages to parents. You work with these families thoughtfully, helping them to liaise with local authority agencies where necessary to get the support they need.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils make at least good progress in mathematics by helping them better understand what they must do to improve
- attendance improves, especially for those pupils who find this difficult.

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

published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Graham Tyrer
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors observed learning in lessons and in tutor times throughout key stages 2 and 3. We observed pupils at break and lunchtimes. We conducted a work scrutiny in books from all three year groups and from across the curriculum. Inspectors held a range of meetings with the headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team and middle leaders. We also met with a representative of the governing body and with the school's local authority improvement partner. Inspectors met with pupils and discussed with them their learning and work in books. We scrutinised the single central register, met with the designated safeguarding lead and examined a range of recruitment records, welfare plans and actions taken to keep pupils safe. Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation which the school produces as part of its self-evaluation and development planning and policies and documents published on the website and made available during the inspection. Inspectors looked at 17 responses from the staff questionnaire. There were 13 responses to Parent View free-text and no responses to the pupil questionnaire. We have taken into account the wider issues raised by the qualifying complaint made available to inspectors.