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Ms Hilary Dunford  
Headteacher  
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Ilminster Avenue  
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Dear Ms Dunford

### **Short inspection of Ilminster Avenue E-ACT Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 17 October 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.

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.**

Ilminster Avenue E-ACT Academy is a lively, busy school that serves a diverse area to the south of Bristol city centre. It is very much at the heart of its community. Parents and children value what the school provides, and staff work hard to support children of all backgrounds and abilities. In this inspection, I found much about the school to celebrate. I also found some areas that need improvement before the school's next inspection.

You and your staff rightly recognise the challenges faced by many families and their children. However, this sincerely held concern sometimes leads to lower expectations of pupils' abilities, skills and attitudes. For younger pupils, this sometimes stops them from making a strong start to their early years of schooling. For example, the use of assessment in early years and levels of challenge in key stage 1 do not show as much ambition and aspiration as they should.

Since the previous inspection, you have maintained a focus on many important aspects of the school's work. This includes an emphasis on English and mathematics in key stage 2, and the involvement of pupils in sport and the arts, including enjoyment and participation in music. During the inspection, early years children thoroughly enjoyed playing instruments, dancing a jig and reading simple music. Older children in the choir took part in a recent BBC music programme.

You have tackled all the areas for improvement from the last inspection with varying degrees of success. The contribution of middle leaders is growing but is not yet having enough impact in all subjects. Similarly, despite some improvement in phonics outcomes last year, pupils do not consistently apply their phonic knowledge effectively in different activities and subjects. You are also in the early stages of implementing a new approach to problem-solving, fluency and reasoning in mathematics. As a result, it is too soon to know if this approach is having a significant impact on pupils' learning. By contrast, pupils' writing in key stage 2 continues to improve. They typically respond well to a wide range of meaningful contexts and ideas for writing.

During this short inspection, we agreed to focus on a small number of important areas of the school's work. Firstly, we considered how well the school is improving pupils' reading. Secondly, we looked at how well children in early years are prepared for Year 1. We also agreed to focus on achievement in key stage 1 and whether pupils are making enough progress in this part of the school. Lastly, we considered the quality of the curriculum in key stage 2 in subjects other than English and mathematics.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

There is a strong focus on safeguarding throughout the school. Staff have a very clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Any concerns about children's welfare are recorded and followed up promptly. Record-keeping is thorough and detailed. You ensure that safeguarding concerns are tackled appropriately with external agencies and that staff training is regularly refreshed and updated. The trust ensures a rigorous and comprehensive oversight of all safeguarding arrangements.

Parents and pupils are confident that staff will listen and respond to any worries they may have. Through the curriculum, pupils learn about staying safe, particularly when using the internet or mobile devices. Since the previous inspection, attendance has improved and is now close to the national average. You make sure that any concerns to do with absence are checked carefully and action taken. Pupils say that behaviour in school is usually good and that bullying is rare. However, after a period in which the use of exclusion from school had steadily declined, it rose again last year. Although only a small number of pupils were affected, the majority of these received more than one exclusion. While leaders ensure that exclusions are applied appropriately and safely, the use of exclusion to manage challenging behaviour is too high.

### **Inspection findings**

- Most children learn to read well by the time they leave the school. For example, attainment in reading by the end of key stage 2 is typically in line with the national average. Targeted help for children who struggle to read is usually effective in helping them to catch up. By the end of Year 2, most children learn

to recognise letter sounds, to break words down and blend the sounds well. Most of the pupils who read to me did so confidently and clearly. Children enjoy reading and staff ensure that those who need to read frequently, and to be read to, are given this opportunity.

- Nevertheless, over recent years, the proportion of younger pupils meeting the expected standard in the phonics screening check has been declining. However, because of improvements in the support provided for weaker readers, results rose last year. This is an encouraging sign. However, there remain some weaknesses in the teaching of early reading. Over one fifth of pupils who started key stage 2 this year had not reached the expected standard in phonics.
- Children in early years listen and behave well. They are eager and attentive and sustain their concentration on activities that interest and engage them. They interact well with each other and with adults. Parents who spoke to me were very pleased with the start their children had made.
- Children enjoy school and are keen to play, take part in activities and to read and write. Despite this, more children should be making good progress in early years. For example, in 2018 the proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year fell when compared to the previous year. Only around half of this cohort met this standard, including only one in three boys. Few children from year to year exceed a good level of development in early years. In part, this is because some initial assessments of children's skills and abilities are too low. This is contributing to low expectations and a lack of challenge for some more able children. Leaders' checks on teaching and assessment in early years do not identify these issues clearly enough. Although you have begun to tackle these weaknesses, including working with other early years settings in the trust, improvements are not yet happening quickly enough.
- Some of the same weaknesses are also affecting achievement in key stage 1. Over time, some pupils are not making as much progress as they could between the end of early years and the start of key stage 2. Similarly, not enough pupils reach a greater depth in their learning by the time they finish Year 2. This is because teachers and adults do not always have high enough expectations of pupils' abilities and achievement.
- You have rightly placed a strong focus on learning in English and mathematics. This is particularly the case in key stage 2, where pupils' attainment over time has been at least in line with the national average. However, as you and the trust acknowledge, published progress measures at the end of key stage 2 are likely to be inflated by pupils' slower progress in early years and key stage 1.
- I also looked at the quality of the curriculum in subjects other than English and mathematics. I wanted to understand whether a focus on these subjects might be to the detriment of a strong curriculum in other areas. I found a mixed picture. For example, teaching in music is of good quality and provides engaging and often inspiring opportunities for pupils to learn. In modern foreign languages the provision is more limited.
- The history curriculum is not planned as coherently as it could be. While

providing useful contexts for developing pupils' writing it is not sufficiently well sequenced to enable pupils to build progressively on their knowledge and understanding over time. Crucially, the subject leader for geography has also identified this same weakness in that subject.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- improve attainment in early years and key stage 1 by raising expectations and the level of challenge provided
- improve the accuracy of assessment in early years
- improve the teaching of early reading so that a greater proportion of pupils meet the expected standard in phonics by the end of Year 2
- develop the curriculum in subjects other than English and mathematics to ensure that pupils build their knowledge and understanding progressively over time
- rapidly reduce the use of fixed-term exclusion to manage instances of challenging behaviour.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for the City of Bristol. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lee Northern  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

I held discussions with you and with other members of staff. I met with the regional director for the multi-academy trust running the school. I spoke both formally and informally with pupils at times throughout the school day, including listening to pupils read. I looked at school improvement planning, assessment records and at the school self-evaluation. I scrutinised safeguarding records and considered evidence of how staff and the trust record and check safeguarding arrangements. Along with staff from the school, I visited classes where I observed learning and looked at examples of pupils' work. I considered parents' responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke with a small number of parents at the start of the school day. The responses of 20 members of staff to a staff questionnaire were also considered.