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Ms Judith Lomas
Headteacher
Brentwood School
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Dear Ms Lomas

Short inspection of Brentwood School

Following my visit to the school on 4 December 2018 with Linda Griffiths, 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 outstanding 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 outstanding as a result of this inspection.**

You lead a warm, caring and welcoming school that holds its pupils at the heart of everything it does. You are in the process of implementing some significant changes to the way the school works and you have successfully engaged the school community in this process. Your collaborative approach is valued by colleagues, governors and the local authority.

Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school and that the staff are 'lovely and kind'. Pupils are very well looked after and care for one another in a respectful and friendly manner. Pupils are confident and enjoy sharing their work and their achievements. They trust adults in the school to help them keep safe. Pupils feel that their ideas and opinions are listened to.

Parents and carers are generally positive about the school and those we met told us that the school is making a positive difference to the life of their child and their family as a whole. One parent told us that there is 'a real equality and humanity between the staff and the children'.

Staff say that they are proud to work at the school. They feel empowered and appreciate the opportunities they are given to develop their skills. They enjoy

learning from one another and value working in curriculum teams. They support the changes you are making and feel fully included in the process.

At the last inspection, leadership in the sixth form was identified as an area that needed to be monitored. Leaders understand the strengths of the sixth form and have effective systems in place to monitor the quality of education. They have developed a curriculum that meets the needs of the students and enables them to gain a range of accreditations and awards. As a consequence, all students move on to education, employment or training when they leave the school.

You were also asked to monitor provision for pupils with autism spectrum disorder. Teaching for these pupils is of a high standard. Pupils are appropriately supported in their communication through a range of strategies and are challenged to develop skills for independence. However, leaders do not report on the progress or attendance of pupils with autism spectrum disorder as a discrete group. Therefore, it is not possible to fully evaluate outcomes for these pupils in relation to their peers.

Since becoming headteacher in April 2017, you have reflected on what you need to do to lead the school through its next phase of development. Your evaluation of the school's strengths is accurate and you have identified key areas for improvement. The changes you are making are well thought through and are focused on the needs of the pupils. However, there has not been sufficient time to fully see the impact of some of these changes, such as in assessment. Similarly, there is further work to do to refine improvements that have been made, such as in checking on the effectiveness of provision for pupils with autism spectrum disorder.

You and the leadership team have changed the assessment system in the school. Initially, in September 2017, you introduced a system for assessing on entry the needs of all pupils who joined the school because you wanted to have a more accurate view of pupils' starting points than you had in the past. You used the school's old assessment system to do this.

Then, in September 2018, you introduced a new assessment system for all pupils. This was because you wanted to assess specific aspects of pupils' learning that the previous system did not assess. You have worked with the staff to develop a system that now assesses the learning you believe is important to the pupils in your school. This new system has been enthusiastically adopted by teachers. At the current time, leaders are unable to evaluate the impact of this change because it is too early to tell.

Leaders have also recently introduced a new system for recording pupils' progress. This corresponds to the new assessment system you have introduced and is closely aligned with the school's curriculum. This new recording system allows teachers to link digital records of pupils' achievements, such as photographs and video clips, to assessments of their progress. As a result, the evidence of pupils' progress is strengthened, particularly for the less able pupils.

This year, all pupils in the school have been assessed using the new system you have implemented. As a result of these changes to assessment, leaders do not yet have enough information to have an accurate view about the progress that current pupils make. This is because it is too early to evaluate the progress pupils make.

You have introduced procedures that have improved the school's response to pupils' absence. There is greater rigour in the new systems that enable staff to follow up pupils' absences. As a result, attendance for this year is currently better than it was last year. However, you do not currently analyse attendance data in a way that helps you identify specific issues or trends for particular groups of pupils.

The governors are committed to the school. They visit regularly and take their roles seriously. They support the changes that you are making and value your approach to working with them. The next step for governors is to ensure that they receive all of the information that they need to effectively and rigorously hold leaders to account.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong safeguarding culture throughout the school. Policies relating to safeguarding are up to date and records, including the single central record, are well maintained. The school has taken into account the co-location of the adult provision, Brentwood College, and has established safe practices to ensure that the supervision of adults attending the college is effective.

Pupils are able to describe how to stay safe and one pupil has produced a presentation about staying safe online. Members of staff are well trained and can explain the safeguarding processes in the school. There are regular updates on safeguarding and weekly briefings to ensure that members of staff are well informed about specific issues. The school employs a family support adviser and a health and well-being worker, who work closely with families to support pupils. The recently formed behaviour team provides greater consistency in the strategies used to support positive behaviour.

The school site is secure and the internal security of the school is carefully considered. There are key pads on doors leading to rooms that contain potential hazards for pupils, and the hydrotherapy pool door is locked when the area is not in use.

Inspection findings

- At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed five key lines of enquiry. The first of these was safeguarding and this was seen to be effective, as described above. The second line of enquiry examined whether the new assessment system provides an accurate understanding of pupils' abilities and allows teachers to set challenging targets. You explained clearly your reasons for changing the assessment system. Members of staff, governors and external consultants agree that this is the right thing to do.

- The new assessment system focuses on learning that is important for the pupils in the school. You have worked in a collaborative way and so teachers understand the reasons for this change and are enthusiastic about implementing the new system.
- Changes in assessment are very recent and, at the current time, leaders cannot determine whether assessments provide an accurate understanding of pupils' abilities. Therefore, leaders do not know whether targets that have been set for pupils are challenging enough.
- The next line of enquiry focused on pupils' progress. Information for last year presents a positive picture of pupils' progress and attainment. However, leaders reported that some information for key stage 3 pupils presents an over-positive picture of their progress from their starting points. They say that this is because the assessment of pupils' starting points was conducted too early in the school year. Consequently, leaders do not currently have a clear picture of the progress pupils make.
- The fourth line of enquiry asked whether leaders and governors have high expectations for pupils. Leaders have initiated changes to the systems in the school in order to provide high-quality education based on the specific needs of the pupils who attend the school. Leaders are ambitious for pupils and have focused on the development of the pupil as a whole person. Throughout this period of change, pupils have continued to gain externally accredited awards, and last year all leavers gained a place in employment, education or training.
- Governors support the reforms that leaders are implementing and clearly want the very best for the pupils in the school. They are clear that they want the school to provide pupils with 'learning for life'.
- The final line of enquiry examined whether leaders and governors had an accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness. This enables them to identify what they need to do to improve the school and to put plans in place to make changes. Governors do not challenge school leaders enough in order to develop their own understanding of the school's effectiveness. They do not have a deep understanding of the evaluations leaders have made about the school's effectiveness.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the recently introduced assessment system is fully embedded, so that leaders have an accurate view of the progress that pupils make from their starting points
- governors are more informed about the effectiveness of the school, in order to hold leaders more rigorously to account
- the analysis of pupils' attendance is further refined to provide leaders with precise information about different groups in the school, such as pupils with autism spectrum disorder.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Hanbury
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you, senior leaders, middle leaders, governors, pupils and members of staff. Inspectors met with seven parents and took into account 18 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents (Parent View), and 16 responses to Ofsted's free-text service. Inspectors read 62 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey and met with a small group of staff.

Inspectors looked at the school's website and read a range of documentation and records, including minutes of governors' meetings, pupil progress reports, curriculum and attainment documents, and safeguarding documentation, including the school's single central record. Inspectors spoke with a representative from the local authority and two external consultants who work with the school.