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Mrs Joanne Hall
Headteacher
Merritts Brook Primary E-ACT Academy
Trescott Road
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Dear Mrs Hall

Short inspection of Merritts Brook Primary E-ACT Academy

Following my visit to the school on 29 January 2019, 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 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Together, you show passion and determination to ensure that every pupil gets the best possible start to their school life and can 'believe, aspire, exceed'. You aim to provide pupils with a wide range of experiences and opportunities, such as learning a musical instrument, to ensure that they leave primary school as confident learners.

You and your staff have created a welcoming environment, which celebrates and encourages learning. Relationships between pupils and adults are strong. Across the school, pupils have opportunities to take on responsibilities such as school council representatives. Older pupils take on a range of school-wide roles such as prefects, play leaders and mental health ambassadors. These roles are taken seriously by the pupils and help to prepare them well for the next stage in their education.

This academic year, you have considerably revised the school's curriculum with the aim of broadening and deepening pupils' subject knowledge. In addition to developing pupils' literacy and mathematical skills, planning focuses on all the individual subjects in the national curriculum. As this is the first year of using this approach, leaders are supporting staff with planning and the provision of resources, as well as checking the impact that it is having on pupils' outcomes.

At the time of the previous inspection you were asked to secure pupils' achievements. Children now make strong progress across the early years and achieve well at the end of Reception. Pupils' outcomes in the Year 1 phonics

screening check are above the national average and at the end of key stage 1 a large majority of pupils achieve the standards expected for their age. While pupils in key stage 2 make similar progress to most pupils nationally, you are taking action to strengthen outcomes in reading and ensure that all pupils, particularly those who are most able, make as much progress as possible.

To raise achievement further, you have created a series of 'non-negotiables'. These set out clear expectations, such as asking challenging questions and ensuring high standards of presentation, to be applied in all classrooms. These expectations are applied in many lessons; for example, teachers and teaching assistants routinely expect pupils to explain and justify their answers. However, not all elements are used consistently across the school and this can have an adverse impact on the quality of some pupils' work. When you and other leaders become aware of any inconsistencies, you take appropriate action to help address them.

The majority of parents spoken to, or who completed a questionnaire, are happy with the progress that their children are making and feel pupils are well behaved. As one parent wrote, 'My children are inspired at this school. They love learning... and are encouraged to be good citizens.' A small number of parents expressed concerns about poor communication. These concerns were not substantiated during the inspection as the school is in regular contact with parents, for example through a weekly newsletter and follow-up text reminders about events.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is an effective culture of safeguarding in the school and 'no stone is left unturned' in relation to securing children's welfare. You and the staff ensure that the school is a safe environment for pupils. All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Pupils said that they feel safe in school, a view that is shared by parents.

Staff have regular and appropriate training, including training in the prevention of radicalisation and extremism, to help them understand their responsibilities in keeping pupils safe from harm. They are clear about what they should do if they have any safeguarding concerns. You work with external agencies as necessary and you are tenacious in following up concerns about a pupil's welfare. You and your strong pastoral team know the local community well and you take account of the circumstances that may impact on pupils' welfare. Representatives from the E-ACT multi-academy trust (E-ACT) oversee safeguarding in school and monitor the effectiveness of the school's procedures.

Inspection findings

- Alongside representatives from E-ACT, you regularly track pupils' academic achievement and personal well-being. This enables you and your staff to identify any additional input that pupils may need. You carefully monitor the impact of this input and adapt it as necessary.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported and make good progress from their starting points. Leaders are effective in identifying

pupils' additional needs and work with external agencies when required. You work closely with parents, keeping them informed of progress and suggesting how they can help their children at home. The special educational needs coordinator carefully oversees the provision of a range of interventions including in-class, small-group and one-to-one support. As a result of a focus on pupils' well-being, you and the team also provide support to help meet pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs.

- Historically, higher-attaining pupils at the end of key stage 1 have made less progress across key stage 2 than pupils nationally with the same starting points. You are taking action to remedy this. You and your staff adapt tasks to make them more challenging or provide additional input to help pupils develop deeper knowledge and understanding. This work is starting to have a positive impact and in-school assessments show that more pupils, especially in upper key stage 2, are now working at the higher standards expected for their age.
- The pastoral team is effective and provides relevant and timely support for parents and families as well as pupils. As a result, many potential problems are identified and tackled early, reducing the risk of issues escalating unnecessarily.
- You have a clear behaviour policy in place and you carefully record any instances of poor behaviour. Since the last inspection, the number of pupils excluded from school has been above the national average, but this is reducing year on year. From school records, I can see that the exclusions that have taken place have been appropriate and fully documented.
- The great majority of pupils enjoy school and attend regularly. However, since the last inspection, overall attendance has remained a little below the national average. You have had a renewed focus on improving attendance since September 2018. As a result, attendance has risen in all classes and you have reduced the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent. You track the attendance of individual pupils rigorously and contact parents when attendance drops below an acceptable level. The procedures you and your staff follow, including contacting parents on the first day of absence, help to ensure that pupils are safe and not at risk of going missing from education.
- Following a disappointing outcome in the 2018 key stage 2 reading test, you have introduced a new approach to the teaching of reading across the school. This includes a focus on improving pupils' reading fluency and encourages pupils to read more frequently at home. It is too soon to see the impact of this approach on pupils' outcomes. During the inspection, we identified that the books some younger pupils practise reading from at home do not closely match their phonics skills. This may impact on their confidence and slow their progress in reading. Older pupils read with increasing understanding and enjoyment.
- Across the school, most pupils have frequent, meaningful opportunities to write in a range of different styles and contexts. Pupils have their own targets which are reviewed every half-term, and which are closely matched to their needs and abilities. Where necessary, pupils receive additional support to help them access texts and resources appropriate for their age. Through regular monitoring, you and other leaders work with teachers to address any practice that does not meet

your high expectations.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers have consistently high expectations to maximise the progress of all pupils
- the approaches to the curriculum and to the teaching of reading are embedded across the school and are effective at further improving outcomes.

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

Yours sincerely

Catherine Crooks
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the senior leadership team and other members of staff. I met with the chief executive officer, the deputy chief executive officer and the regional education director of E-ACT. I talked with some parents at the start of the day and with some pupils, both formally and informally.

Together, we visited almost all classes, where we observed teaching and learning, spoke to pupils and looked at the work in some pupils' books. I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, at breaktime and around school. I reviewed a number of documents including assessment information and documents relating to safeguarding.

I took account of 12 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including eight free-text responses. I also took account of your own survey of parents, completed in November 2018.