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13 March 2019

Ms Karen Gleave  
Headteacher  
Brambles Primary Academy  
Kedward Avenue  
Brambles  
Middlesbrough  
Teesside  
TS3 9DB

Dear Ms Gleave,

### **No formal designation inspection of Brambles Primary Academy**

Following my visit with Richard Knowles, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 27 February 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the outcomes for pupils at the academy, particularly in reading.

During the process of the monitoring inspection, we reviewed leaders' actions to maintain outstanding outcomes for pupils currently at the school. We observed pupils' learning in most classes. We reviewed pupils' assessment information and work in their books. These reviews were undertaken alongside members of your senior leadership team.

We analysed a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding and attendance, along with external reports from your school improvement consultant. We talked to pupils about their learning and heard them read during lessons and more formally at lunchtime.

## **Evidence**

Since your appointment as headteacher in September 2016, you have stabilised leadership successfully, after a period of considerable staffing turbulence following the previous inspection.

You provide strong and decisive leadership and have made excellent appointments to all leadership positions. Leaders at all levels excel in their roles, because of their expert knowledge and skills and the support and guidance you provide. You are particularly well supported by your two very skilled deputy headteachers. Collectively, you have quickly secured the confidence and commitment of all staff, and their morale is exceptionally high. Staff have implicit trust in your combined leadership and welcome the clarity, support and challenge that you bring. This is a remarkable achievement in such a short space of time.

Considerable changes in leaders and the high staff turnover following the previous inspection led to pupils' combined outcomes in 2016 falling well below the national average. One of your first actions was to secure accurate assessment arrangements and establish a new methodology for capturing pupils' attainment and progress. All staff are now well informed and involved in analysing pupils' ongoing assessment information and are held firmly to account for their pupils' success. You set exceptionally high expectations for pupils' achievement and use national benchmarking data to support you in setting aspirational targets. Any pupils who fall short in achieving their targets are supported swiftly to ensure that they catch up successfully. The school's mantra of 'No time wasted' is embraced enthusiastically by all staff.

As a result of focused, very effective teaching and timely interventions and support, pupils' outcomes have improved year on year. In 2018, they were in line with the national average for the key stage 2 combined outcomes measure at the expected standard, and were above the national average at the higher standard. Year 6 pupils' progress rates in writing were well above average and in mathematics were above average. This represents a substantial improvement and an excellent achievement from pupils' low starting points. However, although pupils' individual reading attainment compared favourably to national averages, their overall progress in reading remained average. Some of this negative effect is caused by the high rate of pupils joining the school at times other than those expected. For example, over a third of pupils in the 2018 Year 6 cohort had joined the school during key stage 2.

You have ensured that staff work closely with newly arrived pupils to tackle any deficits in their reading, writing and comprehension skills. You have also adjusted your approaches to the school's use of guided reading to enable pupils to have greater command of their higher-order reading skills. Pupils now receive a daily discrete comprehension lesson, where the higher-order reading skills of skimming, scanning, inference and deduction are taught explicitly. This is paying great

dividends, as pupils currently in the school can give opinions and infer meaning with great confidence and accuracy.

A strong and successful culture of reading is well established; pupils demonstrate great attitudes to their learning and read widely and often. As a result of the introduction of the new and challenging texts that pupils are studying, their progress rates in reading are improving substantially.

The teaching of phonics is consistently strong across all classes. High-quality resources are used expertly by staff, who have excellent subject knowledge. Phonics sessions follow the same format, so pupils can move freely to the next ability groups when they have secured the relevant knowledge and skills. As a result of the most recent updated training provided by leaders, staff are placing greater emphasis on developing pupils' reading fluency skills. This is enabling pupils to use their phonics knowledge very effectively to develop their early writing skills.

Inspectors heard those pupils who did not achieve the expected standard in the phonics screening check by the end of Year 2 in 2017 and 2018 read. We found that, because of very effective and intensive additional support, pupils are now fluent and confident readers who can express opinions and extract meaning from texts very effectively.

As a result of your actions, there is now a very clear approach to the teaching of English, which is universally strong across the school, with high levels of challenge. Successful, meaningful links are made between the study of high-quality texts and the associated knowledge of grammar and punctuation, which is subsequently applied by pupils in their writing. Pupils write confidently in a range of styles. The engaging curriculum ensures that pupils are clear about the purpose of and audience for their writing. However, we found that pupils' subject-specific writing was not developed quite as effectively as their writing in English lessons.

A detailed review of current pupils' progress and achievement in all year groups shows that they are making excellent progress from their starting points. This was supported by a review of pupils' work in their books.

There are no discernible differences in the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils compared to those of their peers. Likewise, teaching, learning and outcomes for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are also excellent, although such pupils' attainment is often below that of their peers. A range of external support services are secured where necessary, to ensure that pupils with SEND receive the best and most appropriate interventions and support.

A review of children's outcomes in the early years indicates that they too make excellent progress from exceptionally low starting points. Provision for children in the early years is very effective. Leaders provide excellent support for children to

make speedy progress in acquiring the skills needed for effective learning. Teaching is focused directly on the needs of individual children, and all children are challenged to do their best. Teachers' questioning is astute and encourages children to use words to explain and express their thoughts. There are lots of opportunities for children to develop their early reading and writing skills, and all staff ensure that the environment is language rich. The opportunities for children to learn outdoors are exemplary. A range of inspiring activities are available for children to explore and investigate. Staff interventions are timely and move children's learning on skilfully.

Your high expectations extend to pupils' behaviour and attitudes. Pupils know implicitly how to behave and how to interact positively with each other and with staff. This is because of the high levels of respect that underpin the school's very inclusive and supportive ethos. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary, and belies some pupils' vulnerabilities. In class, pupils listen carefully to instructions and concentrate on their work in a sustained, purposeful manner. Pupils move around the school in a calm and orderly way, holding doors open for each other and offering warm and welcoming smiles to all. During playtimes, pupils are lively and considerate and play exceptionally well together. Those pupils who talked to the inspectors said that there were no unsafe places in the school, and that there was no name calling, swearing or bullying. They were equally confident that, should an incident occur, there would always be a trusted staff member in whom they could confide.

The excellent work of your pastoral team has ensured that pupils' behaviour and attendance are monitored closely. The team is exceptionally intuitive about any changes in pupils' demeanours and acts quickly to provide much-needed support and advice to families. Although pupils' attendance has improved slightly, you acknowledge that this is something that needs to be constantly under review. You refuse to allow this to have a negative effect on pupils' outcomes. As such, there is no let-up in your expectations that pupils will attend regularly and arrive on time. There are many examples of how your involvement and that of your team have improved pupils' attendance significantly.

Governors are very skilled professionals who apply their skills to offer high levels of support and challenge to leaders. In response to the disappointing results of 2016, they restructured to form a challenge board, which is just that. They meet each half term and review pupils' outcomes in great detail. The governors' searching questions to leaders ensure that no stone is left unturned in enabling all pupils to reach their potential and be well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Inspectors scrutinised documents relating to your safeguarding and child protection arrangements. We also met with several leaders and groups of pupils to check their views and understanding. Your work to keep pupils safe has resulted in a very strong culture of safeguarding within the school. All staff are trained regularly, and weekly updates ensure that the utmost vigilance is afforded to all pupils. A review of child protection records highlighted the range of complex cases you deal with

regularly. It also reflected the high level of professionalism from staff, who regularly challenge decisions they do not deem to be in a pupil's best interests.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Safeguarding is effective.

### **Context**

The school serves an area of high deprivation, where the proportion of disadvantaged pupils is three times the national average. The proportion of pupils with SEND is also much higher than the national average for similar schools. Since the last inspection, there has been a considerable turnover in staffing, with only a third of the staff at the time of the last inspection still employed at the school. There is a new leadership team, including the headteacher and deputy headteachers. The number of pupils joining and leaving the school is also higher than that seen nationally, with almost a third of pupils in each year group having arrived at times other than those usually expected. Since the last inspection, the school has become part of a different academy trust. It now forms part of the Tees Valley Multi-Academy Trust.

### **External support**

Very effective support from the chief executive officer of the trust has been pivotal to the rapid improvements at the school. It has enabled leaders to make the swift changes needed to secure the continuation of the school's outstanding overall effectiveness. The school seeks to work collaboratively with a range of partners and uses the expertise of colleagues from the trust and local authority. The services of external consultants are used to quality assure the leaders' work, including their self-evaluation of the school's overall effectiveness.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Develop pupils' subject-specific writing skills further.
- Maintain the leaders' focus upon improving pupils' attendance.

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

Yours sincerely

Diane Buckle  
Her Majesty's Inspector

