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Mr Andy Bear
Principal
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Dear Mr Bear

Short inspection of Ravens Academy

Following my visit to the school on 5 March 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 July 2015.

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.**

You and your team of leaders, governors and the trust have not maintained the good teaching and high achievement found at the time of the last inspection. The quality of teaching varies too widely, and this limits the progress made by pupils. Outcomes achieved by Year 6 pupils at the end of key stage 2 have declined over the past two years. This includes a significant proportion of pupils who are known to be disadvantaged. The proportions of pupils attaining the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 1 are consistently low. Last year, only half of all children in the early years foundation stage achieved a good level of development.

Your recent appointment as principal has added impetus to the school's drive for improvement. A range of additional resources have been introduced to strengthen the curriculum and improve the teaching of reading, including phonics, writing and mathematics. You have the full support of the trust and governors to take the steps needed to raise achievement throughout the school. Other leaders, including those appointed to lead key stages, are assisting you in this. They understand their roles in making improvements. A suitable action plan is in place to tackle weaknesses and bring about improvements. You are using this plan to carefully monitor at key intervals the impact you and other leaders are having.

Not all pupils attend school often enough. This prevents them from making good progress in their learning. Absence rates have been too high for the past three years. You are beginning to take effective action to reduce persistent absence. A commercial company is helping you to challenge the parents of pupils who are regularly absent and encourage them to get their children back into school. This is also enabling your own staff to work with individual pupils and their parents so that pupils attend school more often.

You and the trust have identified that governance is not as effective as it should be. Governors are supportive, but do not challenge you and other leaders sufficiently about the school's performance. New, senior leadership within the trust is working with you to develop this further. The trust is using its resources to share the good practice within its other schools, help you to develop your middle leaders and improve the provision in the early years.

Safeguarding is effective.

I looked closely at the school's safeguarding arrangements, and the actions taken to protect pupils from harm. The school's arrangements for safeguarding are fit for purpose. The single central record is maintained meticulously. This ensures that all the necessary checks are made when recruiting new staff to work with children. You have recently introduced new, systematic procedures to record safeguarding concerns electronically. This is being managed effectively and provides your designated leaders with a clear overview of safeguarding matters. It is clear from your records that robust action to protect pupils from harm is taken in a timely way.

Training for all staff in safeguarding and in 'Prevent' duty is up to date. Effective partnerships with a range of external agencies ensure that suitable action is taken to protect your most vulnerable pupils. The school site is secure. Access to the buildings is carefully controlled.

Ofsted surveys completed by pupils and staff during the inspection confirmed that the vast majority of pupils feel safe and feel free from bullying. Most staff say that incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively. Pupils told me that incidents do occur at times, but they can go to a member of staff who will help them to sort things out. Only four responses from parents were received during the inspection. They were largely positive, and no concerns were raised about safeguarding.

Inspection findings

- To determine whether the school remained good, I followed four key lines of enquiry. These were based on information about the school's recent performance, the last inspection report and the school's website. I focused on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, particularly in the early years and key stage 1 and the impact this is having on children's and pupils' attainment and progress.
- Outcomes achieved by children and pupils in these settings have remained low for the past three years. You feel that this is due to their very low starting points

when they join the school. Your testing on entry confirms that a significant proportion of them come in with little phonological awareness, and limited speaking and listening skills. However, teaching in the early years does not accelerate their learning and progress well enough. Teachers' organisation and planning varies between the two classes. At times, pupils have too few opportunities to lead their own learning and play, to find out for themselves and explore the indoor and outdoor environments. The outside area is not suitably set up to enable children to develop and extend what they are learning indoors.

- Good relations between staff and children are forged quickly. However, teaching assistants and additional adults are underused. They spend too much of their time listening to the teacher, rather than teaching and supporting pupils with their learning. Time is wasted as children are allocated to groups, and not all of them engage fully in the selected tasks. Staff make good use of a range of learning resources to stimulate children's interest in mathematics. Practical activities and games teach children how to count to 10, double numbers and develop routines such as taking turns.
- In key stage 1, staff manage pupils' behaviour effectively. Pupils remain attentive even during long introductions when they clearly know what they need to do. Questioning encourages them to think for themselves, discuss with others and offer their own ideas. Practical tasks are used well to develop pupils' mathematical skills. Teachers know their pupils well and group them by ability. They plan different tasks for them, but the most able pupils are not always fully challenged. Some tasks are too easy. Pupils who complete them quickly do not have further work provided for them to reinforce and extend their learning.
- Outcomes in national phonics screening checks in Years 1 and 2 have remained consistently low. To improve this, you have recently changed the way your staff teach phonics, using different resources to develop pupils' early reading skills. Your monitoring indicates that this is beginning to lead to improvements. You expect a much higher proportion of Year 1 pupils to meet national expectations this year.
- Teaching in key stage 2 enables pupils to make broadly average progress. The curriculum has been broadened to develop pupils' wider understanding and stimulate their interest through topic-based work. I noted good examples of pupils engaging in creative and practical learning that linked well to aspects they have learned previously. For example, the opportunity to make pancakes on Shrove Tuesday enabled pupils to consider their learning of Christianity and the period of Lent. Not all teachers ensure that tasks are sufficiently challenging to stretch the most able. All pupils are often given similar work to do. The most able pupils cope easily with these tasks.
- I looked closely at your improvement planning, and how you and your governors and the trust are using these plans to bring about improvements. Suitably prioritised plans are in place, which include aspirational targets. Plans are being routinely monitored to gauge whether the actions taken are leading to the improvements expected. You and the trust agree that these plans are rightly focused on making improvements in the early years and key stage 1, including the teaching of phonics. You are using additional support provided by the local

authority and the trust to make improvements in the early years and raise overall achievement.

- Your latest monitoring and assessment show that, overall, pupils are making improved progress. In key stage 1, you predict that the percentage of pupils attaining the expected standard in reading will rise significantly this year. More modest improvements are predicted in writing and mathematics. In key stage 2, your latest assessments show that a much higher proportion of pupils are currently working at age-related expectations in reading and mathematics. More work needs to be done to improve pupils' writing.
- We talked about the actions you are taking to improve attendance. You and the trust acknowledge that attendance remains stubbornly low and that this presents a significant barrier to raising overall achievement. You have commissioned an external company to help you overcome this issue, and early signs of improvement are evident. Letters to parents of pupils with less than 95% attendance are highlighting the role parents must play in ensuring that their children attend regularly. Letters warning of legal action and some penalty notices have also been issued.
- Overall attendance has improved this year. The attendance of key groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has also improved. Further scope for improvement exists to move attendance closer to the national average. Persistent absence rates are falling, but remain too high.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- further improvements are made to gain greater consistency in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the early years
- they jointly maintain their focus on raising the achievement of pupils in all key stages this year
- persistent absence rates fall, and overall attendance continues to rise towards the national average.

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

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders, and a group of pupils. I held a telephone call with the chair of the governing body, and another call to the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust. I spent time with your senior leaders observing pupils at work in lessons. I also spent time outside of lessons at lunchtime observing pupils at play and chatting informally with them. I reviewed your self-evaluation and improvement planning, safeguarding policy and procedures, including the single central record, and records of behaviour and attendance. I considered four free-text responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, 23 responses to the questionnaire for staff and 56 responses from pupils.