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Mr Mike Pearse and Mr Marcus Pickover
Joint Headteachers
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Dear Mr Pearse and Mr Pickover

Short inspection of Ashmead Combined School

Following my visit to the school on 3 April 2019 with Christopher Crouch, 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 good in July 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I am of the opinion that the school has demonstrated strong practice and marked improvement in specific areas. This may indicate that the school has improved significantly overall. Therefore, I am recommending that the school's next inspection be a section 5 inspection.

Ashmead Combined School has continued to improve in leaps and bounds under your dynamic leadership. The local authority, governors, staff and pupils value your drive and ambition. You have created a school culture where the highest aspirations for what staff and pupils can achieve are an absolute given. Governors use their knowledge and expertise to good effect and have a positive impact on school improvement. They support and challenge leaders by asking pertinent questions about teaching, learning and pupils' progress.

Staff benefit from the excellent training that they receive. In all classrooms that inspectors visited, teachers demonstrated confidence, strong subject knowledge and tremendous enthusiasm for teaching. The many staff who responded to Ofsted's online survey said that they enjoy working at the school and are proud to be a member of staff.

This is a fully inclusive school where pupils' differences are embraced and celebrated. Pupils told an inspector that 'Our teachers encourage us, and we are all equally important in our school.' The school is a calm place to learn, where pupils

flourish and display exemplary behaviour. Pupils told inspectors that incidents of bullying are rare. Parents and carers typically say that they are happy with the school and overwhelmingly praise both the academic and pastoral support that their children receive. One parent captured the views of many, telling inspectors that 'Our children are lucky to be part of such an incredible school. This is a nurturing and positive place.'

Leaders know well the many strengths of the school and have made excellent progress with areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. For example, standards of handwriting are high and current assessments show that pupils make consistently strong progress across all year groups.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors ensure that the culture of safeguarding and keeping children safe is of the utmost importance. The school's safeguarding policy and procedures are appropriate and cover all the required areas, including combating risks of radicalisation and extremism. Documents and records of pupils causing concern or at risk are well maintained and thorough. You ensure that all necessary support for pupils who need it is provided. You work well with other agencies, holding them to account when required.

All staff have received up-to-date training and understand their roles and responsibilities. Staff know how to use the well-organised systems to report any concerns. You have made sure that systems for checking the suitability of staff to work with children are rigorous and robust. Pupils feel safe. You ensure that pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe when using the internet and social media. They participate in workshops that help them to know how to keep safe when working online. Teachers have given pupils and parents explicit guidelines on keeping safe in a digital world.

Inspection findings

- At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed to look at specific aspects of the school's work, including the effectiveness of teaching of writing for the most able pupils; how well pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported to ensure that they make good or better progress; and the impact of middle leaders to drive further improvements.
- The school's information about current pupils' progress shows that the most able pupils make substantial and sustained progress in writing in key stages 1 and 2. Work in books shows that the vast majority of the most able pupils thrive on the academic challenge given to them. Staff provide many well-planned and purposeful opportunities for the most able pupils to write in different styles and enhance their writing skills. They are encouraged to think independently and develop their creative ideas. Pupils told me that they enjoy their writing because 'Our teachers challenge us to consider carefully the impact of every word and phrase we use.' You have already identified that the progress of a very small

minority of the most able pupils is not consistently strong in some year groups.

- Leaders have introduced new teaching and assessment strategies, including increased opportunities for teachers to assess writing at the higher standards across the curriculum, for example in science, history and geography. Leaders know that they need to build on current success to ensure that the most able pupils continually extend their writing.
- The provision for pupils with SEND is of an outstanding quality. Ashmead has a high number of pupils with complex needs who are given individualised support and receive high-quality provision, both academically and socially. Pupils with SEND make well above average rates of progress from their individual starting points. This is because they are very well cared for and their needs are quickly identified and precisely met. Teachers and teaching assistants are effectively trained and skilful in their support of these pupils.
- Middle leaders are highly motivated and work well as a cohesive team. They share your determination to continue to raise standards across the curriculum. They have worked successfully to review and redesign the curriculum to ensure that it harnesses pupils' interests, motivates their natural curiosity and instils in them a 'thirst for learning'. As a result, pupils deepen their learning through a variety of activities and opportunities which are rooted in research, investigations and rich first-hand experiences. For example, during the inspection, Year 1 pupils spoke animatedly about the fencing workshop that they attended as part of their history work on castles.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they build on the current successful strategies to further improve the most able pupils' writing across year groups and subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Shazia Akram
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you to agree the key lines of enquiry for the inspection. We also met with other members of the school staff, including your deputy headteacher, your assistant headteacher, SEND leaders, middle leaders and teachers. I met with three members of the governing body. We had conversations with parents and local authority representatives. Inspectors visited all classrooms,

accompanied either by you or one of your senior leaders. We talked to a wide range of pupils and staff and, together with leaders, looked at pupils' work and other evidence to evaluate pupils' progress over time. We scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, plans for improvement, safeguarding records, pupils' progress information, and behaviour and attendance information. We considered 59 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 62 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. I also considered 76 responses to Ofsted's pupils' survey and 60 written responses from parents to Ofsted's free-text facility.