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Mr Christopher Deller  
Headteacher  
Bedford Academy  
Mile Road  
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Bedfordshire  
MK42 9TR

Dear Mr Deller

### **Short inspection of Bedford Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 14 May 2019 with Jason Howard, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Cathy Tooze, 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 October 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.**

Since the last inspection there have been significant and rapid changes in leadership in the school. Following your appointment as headteacher in February 2019 you worked with other leaders to review the effectiveness of teaching and learning, the appropriateness of the curriculum and the school's behaviour policy. You now have a clear understanding of what needs to improve. You are, rightly, pursuing those improvements with determination and at speed.

The leader of teaching and learning is helping subject leaders to better understand their roles and responsibilities. For example, subject leaders are becoming more effective in their work because they are now using information about pupils' progress to identify good practice and areas for improvement.

The school is at an early stage of making improvements, so some new policies and procedures are not yet fully embedded. The quality of teaching in science and in the humanities remains too uneven. However, the leadership team has inspired confidence among staff because they understand your vision and they want to play a role in making the school a better place for pupils to learn.

There are already signs that the school is improving. Pupils' progress in subjects

such as sports science and performing arts is a strength of the school. Pupils are now attending school more regularly and behaving better during lessons and at break and lunchtimes.

The HEART Academies Trust is providing additional and ongoing support which is helping leaders to raise standards in key aspects of the school's work. The recently appointed chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust is committed to continuing to provide school leaders with well-targeted support.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The culture of safeguarding is embedded in policies, practice and training for staff. Pupils at the school said that they feel safe and they reported that they knew who to talk to if they had a concern.

The school has a strong record of working with teachers and organisations outside of the school to ensure that pupils are safe. For example, local police liaison officers have recently led assemblies about knife crime. Pupils told inspectors that in computer science lessons they have learned about how to stay safe online.

### **Inspection findings**

- Inspectors considered whether teachers and leaders are ensuring that pupils are making good progress in humanities and languages because outcomes and uptake in these subjects have been low for at least two years.
- From January 2019, the leadership of humanities has strengthened because the new leader has concentrated on making improvements in history. Teachers are now working together to plan lessons and share resources.
- The one-year intensive GCSE courses which you have offered pupils in Years 9, 10 and 11 have meant that pupils' outcomes in history and geography have been low. Following consultation with pupils and teachers, leaders have made adjustments to the curriculum plan but it is too early to say if the new two-year model will make a difference.
- Previously, modern foreign language learning was not prioritised by school leaders and, as a result, no pupils are currently learning a modern foreign language at key stage 4. The appointment of a new leader for languages has put the school in a better position to bring about improvements. Detailed curriculum plans are now in place and starting to be implemented. Pupils have access to relevant learning resources and language lessons build on prior learning at key stage 2. Pupils told inspectors that they like learning Spanish and they enjoy lessons most when teachers have high expectations of them.
- Inspectors also considered whether teachers and leaders are ensuring that current pupils are making good progress in science because outcomes have been below national averages for at least two years. The multi-academy trust has provided additional support for science. While this has helped pupils at GCSE and A-level make better progress, there are not enough qualified specialist teachers

currently teaching in the school. Pupils told inspectors that frequent changes in science teachers have meant that there are some gaps in their knowledge and understanding.

- In some of the lessons that inspectors visited, pupils struggled to respond to teachers' key questions about their learning. This was because some teachers had not taken into account what pupils already knew and when they were ready for the introduction and practice of new knowledge and skills.
- The school's published data about attendance shows that it is below the national average for most groups of pupils. Inspectors considered whether pupils at the school are safe, secure and if they behave and attend well. Pupils said that they feel safe at school because they are well-supervised and they learn how to stay safe through assemblies and in lessons about ethics and values.
- School leaders have reviewed and analysed behaviour in the school. Senior leaders have worked with staff and pupils to make changes to the way staff respond to poor conduct and encourage behaviour that aids learning. Most staff follow the new behaviour policy and there has been a significant reduction in the incidence of low-level disruption in recent months. Repeated disruption to learning is also declining. You are starting to provide more well-targeted support for pupils who find it difficult to manage their behaviour. However, some pupils chat with their friends when they should be listening to the teacher or concentrating on their work. This slows the pace of learning.
- Pupils' punctuality to school and to lessons has improved markedly. Although attendance is increasing, it remains below the national average.
- Inspectors investigated whether the school provides well for the needs of all pupils, including those who leave the school during the year because of high levels of in-year pupil movement. Most pupils who left the school last year either moved to another local school or moved to a different area. School leaders are now working closely with the local authority to make sure that the school meets the needs of all pupils and that they attend regularly. Inspectors found that many pupils join the school at other than the usual transfer times and their needs are met well.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- subject leaders in humanities, modern foreign languages and science are effective in promoting improvement by monitoring standards and rapidly sharing and adopting good practice
- teaching in humanities, languages and science enables pupils to make strong progress, by:
  - using their understanding of what pupils can do to plan tasks to help them to take the next steps in their learning
  - helping pupils to acquire secure subject knowledge so that they can answer questions confidently

- providing pupils with feedback, in line with the school's policy, that makes clear how they can improve their work
- recently introduced policies and procedures are followed consistently by all staff, so that positive behaviour is encouraged and disruption to learning minimised
- attendance further increases so that it is at least in line with national averages for all groups of pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of your local academy committee, the chief executive officer of HEART Academies Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bedford. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Carpenter  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

The inspection started with your self-evaluation of the school's performance. We agreed the lines of enquiry that the inspectors would follow during the inspection.

Inspectors looked at a range of school documentation, including current assessment information, curriculum and behaviour information, and reviews of teaching and learning. In addition, inspectors looked at safeguarding records and a review of governance. Inspectors visited lessons, looked at work and had discussions with pupils. Meetings were held with you, deputy and assistant headteachers, subject leaders, the special educational needs coordinator and the designated safeguarding lead. Inspectors met with the chair of the local academy committee, the chief executive officer of HEART Academies Trust and a representative from the local authority education team.

Inspectors considered two staff surveys carried out by the school and responses to an Ofsted staff survey. There were no responses to Ofsted pupil surveys. In addition, inspectors took into account a parent survey conducted by the school and 13 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Parent View.