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Mrs Angela Savill
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Savill

Short inspection of Bardfield Academy

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 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 January 2013

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Pupils are happy and eager learners. They say they feel safe, enjoy coming to school and that teachers take good care of them. Parents I spoke with say that their children are happy and make good progress in their learning. This was confirmed by parents who responded to Ofsted's parent survey, Parent View.

Pupils are polite and courteous and behave well in and out of lessons. Strong and positive relationships exist between pupils and staff. Pupils engage positively with their learning and are keen to share what they have learned. You and your leaders have designed a curriculum that enthuses and inspires pupils. Year 4 pupils, for example, enthusiastically shared many different facts about the Ancient Egyptians, ranging from the importance of the River Nile to the Egyptian hierarchical traditions of burial, demonstrating that they had a detailed knowledge of the topic. They were proud to show their mathematics work and writing and they could explain clearly what they need to do to improve.

You and your team work with considerable success to provide a caring and nurturing environment for your pupils. The dedicated pastoral care team is strongly committed to ensuring that families who need extra support receive it in a timely fashion. This includes encouraging good pupil attendance. Your attendance officer has been instrumental in ensuring ongoing improvements in pupil attendance year on year. She is relentless in her actions to make sure pupils attend school as often

as they can. Leaders' effective work with parents and the pastoral team has brought about dramatic improvements in attendance for individual pupils. Leaders know pupils well and work very effectively with the appropriate agencies to support them in readiness for their learning.

The school upholds the deeply held values promoted by the trust. Collaboration, for example, is demonstrated through the school's work to support parents, particularly those families in most need of support, within the local community. Staff, too, are valued, and their well-being is given a high priority. All staff who completed the online survey are proud to work at the school and value the professional development opportunities made available to them. You and the trust provide many opportunities for staff to grow and develop as 'champions' in a specific field of interest and support leadership development at all levels.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your team have developed a very strong safeguarding culture. Highly effective systems for recording pupil concerns ensure that designated leaders for safeguarding are notified immediately. Leaders follow up concerns promptly so that the right support is in place and pupils get the help they need. Processes for checking the suitability of adults who work with pupils and who visit the school meet requirements.

Staff have received the necessary training to help identify pupils at risk from radicalisation and gang activity known as county lines. Pupils trust the teachers to sort out any worries they may have. Pupils have absolute confidence that teachers will sort out any concerns and say that bullying is rare. Pupils also have an appropriate knowledge for their age of the potential dangers when online.

Inspection findings

- You and your leaders have successfully identified why pupils are not making better progress in reading. You have addressed this by ensuring that your curriculum specifically meets the needs of your pupils. You are successfully raising the profile of reading throughout the school. Pupils say they enjoy reading and can choose from a wide range of exciting texts in the inspiring and well-resourced library. Incentives, such as the 'home-school reading' challenge, are engaging parents more and having a positive impact on pupils' enjoyment of reading.
- There has been much success brought about by teachers, in line with your expectations, focusing on pupils' understanding of prediction, inference and deduction to develop these skills further. Leaders' monitoring shows that pupils are becoming more confident when attempting reading comprehension questions.
- There continues to be a strong emphasis on enriching pupils' vocabulary. In each class, pupils learn increasingly complex and exciting words, through exposure to high-quality texts. In addition, teachers consistently model high-level language in

other subjects such as mathematics.

- Pupils explained that they use prompts in classrooms to build on their vocabulary. They confidently explain meanings of words such as 'livid', 'mammoth' and 'isolated'. This has successfully transferred into their writing so that by the time pupils leave Year 6, they can write exceptionally well-constructed and descriptive sentences.
- Pupils' writing in Year 6 shows that they are confident when using advanced punctuation and most demonstrate that they have good grammar skills. This is not yet as secure for pupils further down the school. Your chosen approach to teaching these skills has only recently been introduced. It remains a priority for leaders to ensure that pupils develop these skills much earlier.
- Leaders carefully consider how funding is used to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A high proportion is used for staff training to support the wide range of changing and complex needs. Leaders routinely evaluate pupils' needs and provide staff with suitable training. As a result, teachers and teaching assistants are highly skilled in a range of strategies to support pupils with autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and a wide range of social, emotional and mental health needs.
- You have made sure that pupil premium funding is used very effectively. For example, you have put in place successful strategies which are bringing about improvements in disadvantaged pupils' attendance. Funding is also used for precise teaching in small groups. This has been very successful for supporting pupils who need to catch up in reading, writing and mathematics, including disadvantaged pupils.
- Over time, many pupils, including those with SEND and those who are disadvantaged, make very good progress from their typically low starting points. You and your leaders meticulously monitor their progress from Reception. Evidence shows that pupils currently in school are making exceptionally good progress across the curriculum from when they start school to Year 6.
- Leaders of the early years have ensured that the early years curriculum focuses on language and vocabulary, particularly children's communication and language skills. Leaders identified that language needs to be explicitly taught in Nursery, so that children grasp sounds early and securely. There has been a significant improvement in children's speaking and listening and communication and language development by the time they leave Reception.
- In writing and mathematics, the number of pupils who reach the higher standards in both key stages 1 and 2 is in line with national averages. However, the proportion of pupils attaining the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics has been lower than it should be. This remains a priority for the school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers continue to develop pupils' spelling, grammar and punctuation skills across the school
- pupils are given more opportunities to undertake tasks that enable more pupils to reach the higher standards of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics.

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 Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Cindy Impey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I visited all year groups across the school, to observe teaching and learning and the behaviour of pupils. I examined work in books and spoke with pupils about their learning. I looked at a range of documentation, including safeguarding records, information about pupils' progress, school development plans, leaders' self-evaluations and minutes of directors' meetings. Meetings were held with you, senior leaders, your attendance officer and four members of the multi-academy trust, including the chief executive officer. I also spoke with a group of Year 4 pupils about their learning. I considered 32 responses to Ofsted's staff survey, 13 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and four responses to Ofsted's parent free-text facility. I also spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day.