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Dear Mr Woollard

Short inspection of Blenheim Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 June 2019 with Sue Cox, 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in June 2013.

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.

Standards have risen impressively since the last inspection, notably in the last three years. The proportion of pupils working at the expected standard is at or above national figures at each key stage. In 2018, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception was well above the national figure, despite many children having low starting points. Similarly, the proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics in national tests and assessments for 11-year-olds was significantly above average in 2018. Pupils of all ages make good progress in their learning and personal development. By the age of 11, pupils are well prepared for secondary school. They are confident, curious and resilient learners, ready for new challenges.

Teaching is steered by the school's ethos of 'no child left behind' and a clear vision which empowers all learners to 'be the best you can be'. Collaborative planning within each teaching team ensures that teachers share very high expectations of what pupils can achieve, especially but not exclusively for the most able pupils. Work in English and mathematics, in particular, is very demanding. However, teachers also focus closely on what pupils might get wrong or misunderstand, and

this approach, showcased so well in mathematics lessons, ensures that misconceptions and mistakes are quickly spotted by staff and pupils. From the outset, pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning, and are taught that getting things wrong, and working out how to get it right, are integral to developing secure understanding.

In the early years, learning activities are carefully organised so that children can move seamlessly between the indoor and outdoor spaces and benefit from a good balance of sharply focused tasks and exploratory activities. Throughout the school, teachers successfully balance the need for highly structured learning in basics, such as phonics, spelling, grammar and times tables, with varied and interesting activities. In addition, the pursuit of excellence is firmly rooted in pupils' enjoyment of learning. This is best illustrated in the way that the school nurtures pupils' love of reading, as well as their accuracy and fluency.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Responses both to Ofsted's inspection survey, Parent View, and the school's own questionnaire, reflect parents' very high level of satisfaction with and appreciation for what staff do for their children. Most respondents strongly agreed with every question, and every one of the 104 responses on Parent View said that they would recommend the school. The free-text comments were littered with thanks, praise and extravagant adjectives, such as 'brilliant', 'fantastic' and 'amazing'. Parents made specific mention of the school's efforts to involve them in their children's learning, including the 'back to school' sessions when they can sit alongside pupils in class.

The school promotes pupils' personal development exceptionally well. Pupils' excellent behaviour means that the school is calm and orderly, and ensures that lesson time is used very productively. Parents speak very highly about the way that the school has supported their children, especially when they have specific needs or face problems. Pupils quickly develop very positive attitudes; they are tolerant and respectful of others, and enjoy the many clubs, activities and visits on offer. Pupils said, for example, that they found the visiting authors inspiring, and that educational visits are fun and interesting. More than 70% of pupils participate in optional school clubs and activities.

Leadership is effective at every level, from the top of the trust to the staff in each classroom. Governors know the school well and provide suitable support and challenge for school leaders. Everyone shares the same high ambition and values, and collaborative working enables the school to draw positive benefit from being part of the Learning in Harmony Trust. Links with other schools are productive and help the school to share good ideas and to run efficiently. The trust leadership programme, in particular, provides an excellent way to nurture and hone leadership skills, and it provides good opportunities for staff to work in different schools for the benefit of pupils across the trust.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils' safety and welfare are at the heart of the school's work. Clear procedures

are in place to make sure that the school meets legal requirements in regard to staff training, the completion of safeguarding checks and the reporting and recording of information. Pre-employment checks on the suitability of adults to work with pupils are thorough. School policies and procedures are regularly reviewed, and the trust routinely checks that records are accurately maintained and are up to date. Files are extremely well organised, including communication with external agencies and records of actions taken to support and protect pupils.

Leaders are acutely aware of the need to raise awareness of specific safety risks. Staff have regular training and updates on how to keep pupils safe from harm, and electronic records of this training are well kept. Guidance and support are provided for staff, parents and pupils on modern-day risks posed by social media and the internet, and the threats linked to grooming young children, including through county lines (child criminal exploitation). Staff are trained to be alert to signs of abuse, and are aware of the potential vulnerability of pupils.

The pupils say that they feel safe because they are confident that they can talk to an adult if they are unhappy or have concerns about themselves or their friends.

Inspection findings

- Scrutiny of pupils' work, combined with observations of teaching and discussions with staff and pupils, allayed any minor concerns that inspectors had about standards in writing. The sharp focus on technical aspects of writing, such as syntax, grammar and spelling, ensures that pupils develop as fluent, accurate writers. Pupils are particularly skilful when writing in narrative, using powerful vocabulary to give interest and variety to their work. Writing for other purposes is sometimes less well developed. Pupils' work in subjects such as history and geography does not give them enough opportunity to refine and extend their writing skills.
- Although disadvantaged pupils make good progress overall, inspectors checked that everything is done to support those individuals most susceptible to underachievement, with the lowest academic starting points. It is evident that, even when pupils start from a long way behind and face considerable individual barriers to learning, that the school supports them in attending well and developing essential skills for learning.
- During the inspection, inspectors looked closely at subjects other than English and mathematics (foundation subjects), to evaluate the extent to which pupils are equally stretched in different areas of learning. Leaders have prioritised the review and revision of some of these foundation subjects this year, for example art, music and modern foreign languages. Evidence from pupils' work and observations of teaching indicate quite wide variations in the depth of challenge across this wider curriculum. Learning in some subjects, such as religious education, has a clearer rationale and sharper focus than others. In some subjects and topics, teaching does not focus sharply enough on the essential knowledge or skills that pupils need to learn in order to be successful in their later studies.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils' learning in foundation subjects builds their knowledge and skills progressively and cohesively so that they have the same degree of challenge and achieve excellence across all areas of learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this one-day inspection, inspectors met with you and all members of your leadership team, as well as subject leaders for English and mathematics and the chief executive officer of the academy trust. Inspectors jointly observed teaching and learning in all age groups, including a very wide range of subjects. We spoke to pupils about their work during lessons, and also interviewed two groups of pupils to discuss their work and life at Blenheim. I looked at information on the school's website and evaluated a wide range of additional documentation, much of it provided by the school, including leaders' school self-evaluation and planning documents. I took account of the views of 42 staff from Ofsted's staff questionnaire, and the views of the 104 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, which included many free-text comments.