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12 November 2018

Joanna Agate
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Dear Mrs Agate

Short inspection of Harriers Banbury Academy

Following my visit to the school on 30 October 2018, 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 November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since returning from your maternity leave, you have quickly established yourself in your new role as principal. You work very closely with the executive principal, who ran the school in your absence last academic year.

Leaders have a clear and accurate view of what the school does well and what could be even better. They have identified that writing is an area for development, which my inspection activity confirmed. They also know that there is a need to improve the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders are very ambitious for the school. They have developed a culture of high aspirations, where pupils and staff 'fly high'. Moulding the whole child is important to staff at Harriers Banbury Academy, as is preparing the pupils for the next stage of their education. Many parents commented on how happy their children are at the school. They appreciate the dedication from staff. As one parent commented, 'Teachers approach each day with positivity and enthusiasm.' Staff morale is high. All staff who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire said they are proud to work at the school.

Pupils enjoy coming to Harriers Banbury Academy. They say that their teachers are friendly and kind, and that adults in the school respect them. During my visits to lessons, I observed how engaged pupils are in their learning and how well they listen to their teachers. Pupils say that their teachers ensure that they work hard. As one pupil said, 'Our teachers really push us to reach the higher standards. That is a

good thing.' They love many aspects of school life, including the recent Year 6 residential to Wiltshire and after-school clubs.

Since the last inspection, leaders have opened a nursery to raise children's attainment and strengthen their progress at this crucial point in their learning. My visit to Little Harriers showed that children are provided with a variety of exciting and challenging learning activities that are matched well to their needs and interests.

At the time of the previous inspection, leaders were asked to develop the role of middle leaders in bringing about school improvement. You have been particularly successful here. Together with members of your multi-academy trust, you have developed the skills of leaders well. They are empowered and lead their areas effectively. It is clear to see that strong, collaborative leadership is providing capacity for the school to improve further. Leaders place a strong emphasis on professional development. As a result, teaching is effective. Leaders work in partnership with the multi-academy trust, which provides rigorous monitoring and challenge. The local advisory board and the district board have an accurate understanding of what the school needs to do next. Members work with leaders and the multi-academy trust to set the strategic direction for the school and play a full part in monitoring its effectiveness.

The previous inspection also noted that there was a need to improve the level of challenge for the most able pupils. You have taken effective action to improve this area. However, we agreed that the level of challenge could be improved further in mathematics.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding in which there is no complacency. Policies, procedures and day-to-day routines are secure. Any necessary actions are completed without delay. Safeguarding training is regular, with a specific focus on the local risks facing your community. The designated safeguarding leads have built very positive working relationships with external agencies. They access suitable support for vulnerable pupils and their families in a timely way. They follow up safeguarding issues tenaciously.

During the inspection, I identified a discrepancy in the single central record. This oversight was addressed immediately, demonstrating leaders' and administrators' commitment to meeting statutory requirements.

In the past, the proportion of pupils who have received a fixed-term exclusion has been above that typically seen in primary schools. The rate of exclusion is now dropping. Exclusion occurs very rarely and is used only as a last resort.

Pupils are regularly taught about anti-bullying, road, fire and online safety. As a result, they have a secure understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Behaviour is a strength at Harriers Banbury Academy. Vulnerable pupils are

supported well. As one parent wrote, 'The aspirations and values of the school give the children responsibility and accountability for their own behaviours.'

Inspection findings

- At the beginning of the inspection we agreed that we would focus on: how well teachers challenge the most able pupils; how effectively leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils achieve well; and the effectiveness of teaching in English.
- In 2017, by the end of key stage 2, a greater proportion of pupils reached the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics than was seen nationally. Leaders were disappointed, however, with the provisional key stage 2 results for 2018, which indicate that fewer pupils reached the higher standards than the national picture. During my visits to lessons, and while looking at pupils' books, I saw clear evidence that teachers have high expectations of what the most able pupils can achieve in reading and writing. These high expectations are evident right from the beginning of a child's journey at Harriers Banbury Academy. We agreed, however, that the most able pupils are not being moved on to the more challenging tasks soon enough in mathematics. As a result, they do not make as much progress as they could.
- Staff have a good understanding of the barriers to learning faced by disadvantaged pupils in the school. Teachers plan for disadvantaged pupils well, carefully considering both pastoral and academic needs. Leaders have recently changed their approach to allocating interventions. They have become more forensic in their approach to identifying specific gaps in learning. Interventions are now sharply focused on what needs to be taught and practised. However, assessment information shows that disadvantaged pupils' attainment is generally lower than their classmates'. Support is not evaluated well enough that leaders can be certain that the funding is used effectively to strengthen progress for disadvantaged pupils.
- Pupils make good progress in reading and writing from their typically low starting points. Pupils enjoy reading. I observed high levels of excitement and engagement in reading lessons, due to carefully chosen books. Pupils write with confidence and show a strong stamina for writing. Older pupils are very clear on how to improve their writing further. They are actively involved in setting their own writing targets based on the previous half term's learning. Teachers skilfully extend pupils' vocabulary using high-quality texts. However, during the scrutiny of pupils' work in writing, leaders acknowledged that there is still work to do to ensure that pupils' punctuation, handwriting and spelling skills are consistently high.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils are moved on more quickly in mathematics once they have a secure understanding of a concept so that a higher proportion of pupils reach higher standards

- they sharpen their evaluation of the impact of the pupil premium funding
- punctuation, spelling and handwriting skills are taught to a consistently high standard, particularly, but not solely, in key stage 1.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local advisory board, the chief executive officer of Aspirations Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Oxfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lea Hannam
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the executive principal and the vice principal to discuss the school's effectiveness. We visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning, talk to them and look at their work. With your senior leadership team, I looked at the quality of work in pupils' books. I considered 37 responses from parents to the online questionnaire, Parent View, including free-text comments. I also spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day. Responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil questionnaires were considered and I had a meeting with a group of pupils to discuss their views about the school.

I met with six governors from both the local advisory board and the district board. I also met with a representative from the multi-academy trust. I evaluated the school's safeguarding arrangements. A wide range of documents was examined, including: the school's self-evaluation; school improvement planning; the pupil premium strategy; information about pupils' progress; and various policies. I also examined the school's website.