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Mrs H Keenan
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Dear Mrs Keenan

Short inspection of Brownhills School

Following my visit to the school on 16 May 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Gwendoline Onyon, 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 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.

You have a very clear understanding of what needs to be done to ensure that all pupils at the school fulfil their potential. You identify precisely and accurately the strengths and weaknesses of the school and have developed a leadership team with the capacity to improve the school further. Leadership of safeguarding and teaching and learning is a strength of the school. Governors have made the decision, in the best interest of the pupils, to suspend post-16 provision. However, they are actively seeking to collaborate with other educational providers to reinstate the sixth form. Two students are currently completing their post-16 studies and have secured places in higher education or training.

At the last inspection, leaders were asked to improve achievement by eliminating inconsistencies across subjects. Leaders recognise that inconsistencies are still evident in some areas, for example in French, geography and history, where outcomes are not in line with national figures. You have ensured that plans are in place to rectify these inconsistencies. Whole-school teaching and learning have been strengthened by the appointment of a new assistant headteacher. Teaching and middle leadership in these subjects have been strengthened by the appointment of new teachers. Leaders now evaluate the quality of teaching in these areas to be at least good. They are confident that pupils' progress will improve significantly to be in line with other stronger subjects, such as mathematics and

English. You have extended the senior leadership team so that there are representatives from the full range of subject areas. This ensures that successful achievement-raising strategies are shared and progress in all areas is closely monitored and evaluated.

The senior leadership team ensures that teachers are encouraged to share knowledge and expertise in order to improve the standard of teaching. Teachers have the opportunity to see each other teach and reflect on their own lesson planning in order to meet the needs of individual pupils. The school's own training programme is highly structured and focused on what needs to improve in order to teach outstanding lessons. Teachers are encouraged to experiment with new ideas so that all pupils are supported, as well as challenged, to ensure that they make at least good progress and enjoy their learning.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a very high quality. Designated safeguarding leaders ensure that the well-being and safety of pupils are of the highest priority. Leadership is clear, thorough and compassionate and, consequently, a culture of shared responsibility exists among staff and governors. A caring and professional approach contributes strongly to the positive ethos in the school.

Staff and governors are very well trained and have regular updates on safeguarding issues. Governors receive half-day training sessions in school and challenge the school leaders on safeguarding procedures. Governors seek the views of pupils, who tell them that they feel safe in school. Staff have weekly 'drip, drip,' safeguarding briefings, for example on domestic violence. These ensure that the safety of pupils is always a priority and that staff are well informed in order to act swiftly if a safeguarding issue arises.

Pupils comment on how safe they feel in school at all times. Pupils say that bullying is rare and, if it does occur, it is dealt with 'straight away and treated very seriously'.

Pupils speak highly of the way that the school teaches them to keep safe and they are well informed about issues such as extremism and radicalisation. The majority of parents agree that their children feel safe in school.

Inspection findings

- Leaders have used information from an external review to introduce strategies to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils by providing additional support for their well-being, attendance and literacy needs when required. Senior leaders hold middle leaders to account in line-management meetings with rigorous monitoring of the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Pupils who are underachieving are highlighted in a weekly raising-achievement group meeting

and additional support is put in place. Teachers are given detailed information on all disadvantaged pupils in order to support them fully in lessons and to ensure that they are challenged. As a result, disadvantaged pupils are now making better progress in lessons and in internal assessments.

- Although improved, disadvantaged pupils' progress is not yet in line with other pupils nationally. There is still a difference between the progress of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils in some subjects in the school, although this is decreasing.
- In 2016, boys' overall progress at key stage 4 was not as strong as that of girls. Teachers have had specific training in order to develop strategies to improve boys' progress. These have included increased competition in mathematics lessons, the effective use of questioning and more immediate feedback on work. Literacy was seen as a key issue hindering progress for some. Leaders have developed strategies to improve boys' skills in this area. A literacy programme has been introduced and the reading resources used in lessons have been chosen specifically to be more attractive to boys. As a result, there has been a marked improvement in the reading ages of boys who are involved in the programme, over a relatively short period of time.
- Teachers have given considerable time and thought to the development of attractive teaching resources to further engage boys. These have been observed being used effectively in lessons such as geography. As a consequence, the difference between boys' and girls' outcomes is reducing.
- In 2016, progress in French and humanities subjects was below national figures. French, history and geography have been identified by leaders as priority areas for improvement. Teaching and leadership in these areas have been strengthened. In French, there has been the development of a new scheme of work for pupils that ensures that pupils are engaged and stretched. In history, there is a greater emphasis on literacy skills in order to ensure that pupils are better prepared for their examinations. In geography, there has been the development of new resources and better guidance is given to pupils to support them in their preparation for controlled assessments. As a consequence, there has been significant improvement in the progress pupils are making in lessons. Leaders can demonstrate the improvements using the school's own assessment data.
- Many of the initiatives to improve pupils' outcomes in French and humanities are relatively new and, therefore, the impact of these improvements has not yet been seen in external examination results.
- Leaders are very aware that the attendance of all pupils needs to improve, particularly that of disadvantaged pupils and some pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. In 2016, attendance for all pupils was below the national average. Leaders systematically analyse attendance information and are working hard to improve the attendance of all groups. Good attendance is promoted at every opportunity with pupils, staff and parents and is a high priority in the school. Some examples of this are rewards for good attendance and tutor assemblies, which pupils say they enjoy. Governors are well aware of the importance of good attendance and analyse the data by group.

They provide good levels of challenge in order to evaluate the success of strategies implemented by school leaders.

- Current attendance data shows improvements, particularly in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, these are not yet meeting national averages. Pupil premium funding provides additional home support for disadvantaged pupils whose attendance is affecting their progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to improve the progress and outcomes of disadvantaged pupils
- changes already implemented in French and humanities are embedded to ensure that pupils make better progress and attain more highly in these subjects
- attendance continues to improve for all pupils and, in particular, for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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

Yours sincerely

Karen Lockett
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Meetings took place with you, members of your senior and middle leadership team, the chair and two members of the governing body and a group of pupils from key stages 3 and 4. Inspectors examined the school's self-evaluation document, the school improvement plan, monitoring records concerning achievement, teaching and learning, attendance and exclusions and safeguarding documentation. The single central record was checked and relevant safeguarding procedures were reviewed. Learning walks to observe lessons in key stages 3 and 4 were conducted with and without members of the senior leadership team. Lesson observations were conducted and inspectors spoke with pupils and looked at work in books during lessons. Inspectors heard pupils in key stages 3 and 4 read in lessons. No responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey were received. Twenty-seven responses to Parent View and 33 responses to the staff questionnaire were received.