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Gerard Hudson and Satnam Dosanjh
Executive headteacher and headteacher
Starbank School
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Dear Gerard and Satnam

No formal designation inspection of Starbank School

Following my visit with Bianka Zemke, Her Majesty's Inspector, along with Gwen Onyon, Philip Harrison, Sally Noble and Paul Whitcombe, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 1 and 2 May 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because the school has undergone significant change by expanding to three sites and adding a secondary phase since it was previously inspected.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. Meetings were held with: senior leaders; other school staff, including middle leaders in all phases of the school and the community project workers; the chair and two other members of the governing body; a group of parents and three groups of pupils. Inspectors spoke informally to other pupils and staff in lessons, at breaktimes and as they moved around the school. Other parents were spoken with as they collected their children from school. The 27 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account. Inspectors visited lessons in all year groups on all three of the school's sites to talk to pupils about their learning and examine the work in their books. Around half of these visits were carried out jointly with senior staff. Inspectors listened to primary-aged pupils read and attended an assembly. Other documents

were examined, including the school's plans for improvement and information about pupils' attainment and progress.

Having considered the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

- the outstanding quality of education has been maintained
- safeguarding is effective.

Context

At the time of the previous inspection, the school catered for 890 pupils aged three to 11. It was based in Starbank Road, with Years 4 to 6 housed on a nearby site. The current executive headteacher was headteacher of the school at the time. The current headteacher was the deputy headteacher. Since then, the number of pupils who require a school place in the area has increased substantially. The number has been more than that of available places. To ease the pressure, the local authority (LA) invited the governors to increase the school's size to six classes in each year group and offered the use of nearby disused school premises to house the additional pupils.

Many of the pupils placed at the school have previously experienced a disrupted education. Many have missed a substantial amount of schooling. Some arrive with no prior experience of formal education. A notable proportion are from refugee families. Some have suffered severe trauma before settling in Birmingham. Many of the parents do not speak English. Other pupils have been permanently excluded from their previous schools.

After taking on the second site at Bierton Road, the school continued to grow substantially. In order to provide secondary school places for the school's pupils, the LA asked the governors to extend the provision to include a secondary phase. The school started providing secondary education to Year 7 pupils in September 2014 and has grown each year since. Currently, the secondary phase caters for Years 7 to 10. No pupils have yet taken GCSE or equivalent public examinations as these are sat by pupils at the end of Year 11. The first set of examinations will be taken in the summer of 2019.

Between September 2014 and July 2016, Year 7 and Year 8 pupils were educated in temporary classrooms on a site near to the current Hob Moor Road site. The new building was opened in September 2016. Since then, all secondary pupils and one third of the primary pupils have attended Hob Moor Road. The current number of primary and secondary pupils across all three sites is 2072.

Almost half of the current pupils are entitled to free school meals. The proportion of pupils that have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is above the national average. At least eight out of every 10 pupils speak English as an additional language, which is well above the proportion in most schools.

The rapid outward and upward expansion of the school has required a quick and continuous increase in the number of staff. Five deputy headteachers and eight assistant headteachers support the executive headteacher and headteacher in the day-to-day management of each of the school's three sites. Many teachers have joined the primary phase. From 2014, there has been the need to recruit suitably qualified teachers for the secondary phase. This was a challenge, particularly in the first two years of secondary provision, because few teachers applied to work in the temporary facilities. The majority of teachers in the secondary phase are recently qualified. Eighteen new staff have been appointed to join the school in September, when it is due to reach its full capacity of Year 7 to 11 pupils. The majority of this new group of teachers are experienced at teaching in secondary schools.

Main findings

The executive headteacher and headteacher have embraced the challenges and opportunities presented by the school's dramatic expansion in terms of its size and the age range of its pupils. They have led the transition inspirationally. At the heart of their approach is the complete determination that the school must not lose the essence of what made it outstanding: the commitment that the school serves its community as well as possible. To have succeeded in replicating the exceptional ethos, care and quality of education noted at the time of the previous inspection of Starbank Primary School across three sites and into the secondary phase is truly a praiseworthy achievement.

Staff on all three sites share this vision wholeheartedly. A highly effective team of deputy headteachers, supported very well by assistant headteachers and middle leaders, works as an extremely cohesive unit to ensure that pupils on each of the three sites receive exactly the same experience of schooling. For example, classrooms in the early years look and feel equally as welcoming and exciting in the 1930s buildings in Starbank Road and Bierton Road as they do in the purpose-built new building in Hob Moor Road. The quality of teaching is identically impressive on all three sites.

Similarly, the work in pupils' books in key stages 1 and 2 shows that teachers follow the school's policies and curriculum plans precisely. This results in books that are identically presented by pupils of the same ages and abilities in each of the three sites. There are no differences in the quality of education. It is equally high in all. Each site is an outstanding primary school in its own right. However, the three are separate parts of one, exceptional, school.

The first two years of the secondary phase were difficult for a number of reasons. Firstly, the school had to operate using a collection of temporary classrooms while the current building was being constructed. Secondly, in the early days, leaders struggled to recruit experienced secondary teachers to what was an embryonic school. Many of the pupils placed by the LA in the secondary phase had significant additional needs, due to their circumstances. Leaders, including governors, have

been resolute in appointing only the most suitable candidates, even when faced with the difficulties of not being able to fill posts. They are adamant that staff must share the vision and be able to deliver the precise and very high expectations they have for the quality of teaching. Little by little, the secondary team is building into a highly effective group. A leadership structure is being crafted to meet the school's needs well as it completes its evolution into a full 11 to 16 secondary phase. New appointments for September have been made carefully to complete the team. For example, a suitably experienced leader has been recruited to ensure that pupils receive high-quality careers information, advice and guidance. This is intended to build on the programme already established in readiness for the first cohort of Year 11 pupils moving on to the next stages of their education, employment or training.

The school's expansion has had no detrimental effect on pupils' outcomes in the early years or primary phase. In fact, the reverse is true. The quality of education has improved further since the previous inspection. Many pupils start at the school with much catching up to do. At whatever age they join the school, they soon start to make rapid progress in a wide range of subjects. As a result, they gain lost ground quickly and go on to achieve very well.

Very few children enter the Nursery or Reception classes able to communicate as well as typical three- or four-year-olds. Many struggle to manage their emotions or to socialise with other children. Teachers very quickly assess what children need to learn and are highly skilled in providing the right experiences to make this happen.

The activities on offer in the early years are effective because they capture children's imagination. Teachers ensure that each activity enables children to practise specific skills. Every day, teachers take stock of how well children are learning. They modify subsequent activities to boost progress where needed. As a result, children learn new skills securely. By the time they complete the Reception Year, many children reach the good level of development that will enable them to cope with the demands of the national curriculum in Year 1. Compared with the small number that were ready to start school at the beginning of Reception, this is impressive. Nevertheless, leaders are keen for the number to be higher. This is because they want the proportion that reaches this standard to be in line with the national figure.

In key stage 1, pupils build rapidly on the skills learned in the early years. For example, they soon learn how to apply their phonics knowledge to help them write. From a hesitant start, pupils quickly learn to write sentences confidently in Year 1. They go on to be able to write effectively for a range of purposes, using well-chosen words and language features that make their work interesting to read. The primary English leader has skilfully led the introduction of a new approach to delivering the English curriculum. This has raised the profile of reading and is enabling pupils to access a rich diet of literary and cultural experiences.

Similarly, in mathematics, pupils acquire a strong grasp of basic number skills. They

learn how to apply these to help them answer challenging mathematical questions. They can explain their thinking and reason mathematically to a high degree. This feature of pupils' mathematics work is improving strongly as a result of the effective leadership of the subject in the primary phase.

By the end of key stage 2, pupils' attainment is at least in line with the national average in reading, writing, mathematics and science. This reflects the strong progress made year on year through the primary phase from pupils' below-average starting points. Leaders' assessment information shows that the proportion of pupils working at and above the expected standards for their age is increasing. The work in pupils' books confirms this to be the case.

As a result, most pupils are well prepared for the transition to the secondary phase by the end of Year 6. Staff know pupils very well by this point. This means that no time is wasted at the beginning of Year 7. The swift rate of pupils' progress continues. As a result, pupils in key stage 3 are working at high standards for their age, given their starting points.

Many pupils in key stage 4 (currently Years 9 and 10) have significant gaps in their understanding in many subjects. This is a result of the disruptions to learning experienced by many prior to joining the school in Year 7. Teachers in key stage 4 systematically identify what pupils do not know and effectively teach the missing bits of knowledge. Pupils are catching up fast. However, for some pupils there is too much to do before the end of Year 11. For this reason, pupils' attainment overall in key stage 4 is currently below average.

Across the school, all groups of pupils achieve equally well. Disadvantaged pupils are very well supported by the school's clever use of the pupil premium. Leaders use the funding to support families in working with the school to boost their children's achievement. For example, some of the money is used to run English classes for parents. This is important because it enables parents to better support learning at home. In school, the funding is used to provide effective teaching and additional support as required to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make the rapid progress they need to catch up with other pupils nationally. In the early years, children's needs are identified. The actions taken help to start to reduce the difference between disadvantaged children and others. In key stages 1 and 2, disadvantaged pupils make even swifter progress than their classmates. By the end of key stage 3, there are no differences in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and others in the school. This shows that disadvantaged pupils are catching up steadily with other pupils nationally.

The well-coordinated support given to pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities ensures that they achieve very well. In the same way as disadvantaged pupils, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities catch up during their primary years and attain in line with national averages by the end of key stage 3.

Similarly, the sensitive and effective programme of support for pupils who are new to learning English helps them to quickly acquire the language skills they need to achieve well across the curriculum. Consequently, they achieve as well as their classmates.

Leaders take safeguarding matters very seriously. As the school has expanded, leaders have ensured that the vigilance around pupils' well-being is consistently strong across all sites. In addition, leaders realised that there are specific safeguarding issues that are pertinent to secondary-aged pupils in addition to those in the primary phase. They have provided appropriate training for the designated senior leaders for safeguarding. This enables them to take the necessary action to protect pupils from these risks.

In addition, leaders firmly believe that it is through working with families that they can best protect pupils. Consequently, the school works extensively to support families who are in need of help. In this way, the school contributes substantially to the welfare of the local community. For example, the efforts to teach parents to speak English are paying dividends. Parents told inspectors that they now feel that they can ask for help if needed. As a result, families who need help to protect their children get appropriate support.

The school is situated in an area of Birmingham which has experienced significant tensions between different groups in the community. The school's efforts to help protect pupils beyond the boundaries of the school site have facilitated a notable degree of interaction and cooperation between parents from different backgrounds and cultures. This is having a positive impact on the community and is supporting the wider safeguarding of the school's pupils. For example, the community project workers have led a drive across the community to tackle child sexual exploitation. These staff have received official recognition from the chief constable of the West Midlands police force for their exemplary work in this area.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that the highly effective start to delivering secondary-phase education is continued so that all year groups make as much progress as they are capable of as they move through the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Sandra Hayes
Her Majesty's Inspector