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Mr A Doust
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Doust

Short inspection of Meole Brace School

Following my visit to the school on 16 November 2018 with Dr Elizabeth Ellis-Martin and Ms Lois Kelly, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 March 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Meole Brace is a popular and successful school, which attracts pupils from a wide area. It has an enviable reputation for caring for its pupils and for knowing them well. Pupils at the school are happy, attend well and usually work hard. Pupils achieve well although GCSE results in 2016 and 2017 were a little uneven. GCSE results improved in 2018.

You have brought clarity and renewed ambition to the leadership of this school since your arrival at the start of this year. There is a renewed focus in the school on academic success, particularly for higher-attaining pupils and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Your earlier experience elsewhere, as a successful headteacher, has equipped you well for your role at Meole Brace. Staff, governors, pupils and parents have all welcomed your appointment and your inclusive approach to bringing about any necessary change.

Many of the school's senior leaders are experienced and have a deep understanding of the school and its history. A few joined the school more recently but have brought some useful and fresh ideas, particularly with regard to teaching and learning.

The school has made reasonable progress in addressing the areas that were identified as needing improvement at the last inspection. Improvement plans for the

school now include specific, measurable success criteria with clear timescales for action. Teachers have benefited from a wide-ranging programme of training and work hard to plan lessons that cater more for the needs of different pupils. The attendance and achievement of disadvantaged pupils has improved. However, some disadvantaged pupils still do not do as well as they should in GCSE examinations and higher-attaining pupils are not challenged evenly enough in all lessons. Senior leaders now work closely with subject leaders to review how well each subject area in the school is performing.

Your recent review of progress in all these areas has led to rapid identification of what else needs to be done to improve the school even further. In particular, you are emphasising the quality of the curriculum more, and the way it is taught, so that all pupils are helped to achieve as much as they can. Moreover, you recognise that senior leaders could provide more helpful feedback to teachers about how to improve their practice. As part of this, you are realigning senior leaders' responsibilities to fit more neatly, and proportionately, with the school's priorities.

Parents are mostly very happy with the school and say that it helps their child do well and to grow in confidence. The school seeks, and acts on, the views of parents regularly. A few parents expressed concern about unevenness in the quality of teaching and aspects of some pupils' behaviour.

The governing body at Meole Brace is very well led. Individual governors are skilled, experienced and astute. They understand their role in collectively holding the school to account. They recognise, for example, that some pupils are not achieving the results they are capable of. Governors are also determined that pupils should develop personally into rounded, confident and successful young people. Governors were well supported by the local authority during the recent process for the appointment of a new headteacher.

The school is expected to convert to academy status in early 2019 with two other successful local secondary schools.

Safeguarding is effective.

Pupils are cared for well at the school. Behaviour is usually good and swift action is usually taken if any misbehaviour occurs. Senior leaders and their staff work assiduously to ensure that pupils are safe. They manage the school environment well so that it supports pupils' welfare. Suitable checks are made to any visitors to the school. Senior leaders and staff liaise closely with other agencies, including children's social care services if needed.

Pupils know what to do, and who to speak with, if they have a concern about themselves or others. Pupils are taught how to take care for themselves physically and emotionally. The school has been recognised by Public Health England for its support for pupils' well-being and mental health.

Staff are trained in keeping pupils safe. If a concern arises, they know what

procedure to follow and who to seek advice from. Governors are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities, including the importance of recruiting new staff safely. All safeguarding records are sufficiently detailed and suitable arrangements for protecting pupils are in place.

Inspection findings

- As well as safeguarding and action taken to improve the school since the last inspection, our inspection activity focused mainly on teaching and learning in English, the work given to higher-attaining pupils across the different subjects, and the effectiveness of strategies used by the school to improve further the progress of disadvantaged pupils.
- GCSE examination results in English dipped in 2016 and some pupils did not perform as well as they should. Results have improved in each of the last two years by developing the curriculum, increasing pupils' knowledge of examination requirements, and by giving pupils more practice in writing GCSE answers.
- English is now well taught across the school. Pupils study a range of interesting and challenging texts and develop relevant critical and expressive skills. Effective teaching is helping current pupils to achieve well in English, including higher-attaining pupils.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to explain things clearly to pupils. Lessons frequently involve the use of technical and subject-specific language. However, some pupils could do better across a range of subjects if they further improved aspects of their basic writing, such as spelling, grammar and presentation.
- More widely, teachers have begun to challenge the most able pupils more effectively. This is helping to ensure that all pupils work at the right level and develop detailed subject knowledge and understanding. Plans to extend this, by enriching the curriculum further, are at the early stages of development, including by introducing more 'stretch and challenge' activities, extension of pupils' cultural and social experiences, and more well-sequenced programmes of study between Year 7 and Year 11.
- GCSE results for disadvantaged pupils have improved over the last two years, including in English, mathematics and science. However, evaluation of the impact of actions taken by leaders to improve disadvantaged pupils' progress is not detailed enough. It is not always clear to senior leaders what actions had the most impact or what else needs to be done. In many instances, disadvantaged pupils have not developed good enough learning habits and need, for example, to extend their vocabulary.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils who are most academically able and those who are disadvantaged are supported further so that they achieve even more

- teachers are given more specific advice about how to improve their practice
- more emphasis is given to evaluating the impact of actions taken by leaders on pupils' outcomes.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Cladingbowl
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection we visited lessons across a range of subjects. We observed pupils at work and during break and lunchtime. We met with pupils to talk about their experience of school. We scrutinised the amount and difficulty of the work done by pupils in their books and folders. We met with senior leaders as well as with other staff. We scrutinised a range of documents, including those provided by the school, and information about safeguarding, attendance, behaviour, pupils' examination results and progress, teaching and governance. We met with a representative of the local authority and with two members of the governing body. We took account of views of parents by looking at information provided by the school and considering 138 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 21 written comments.